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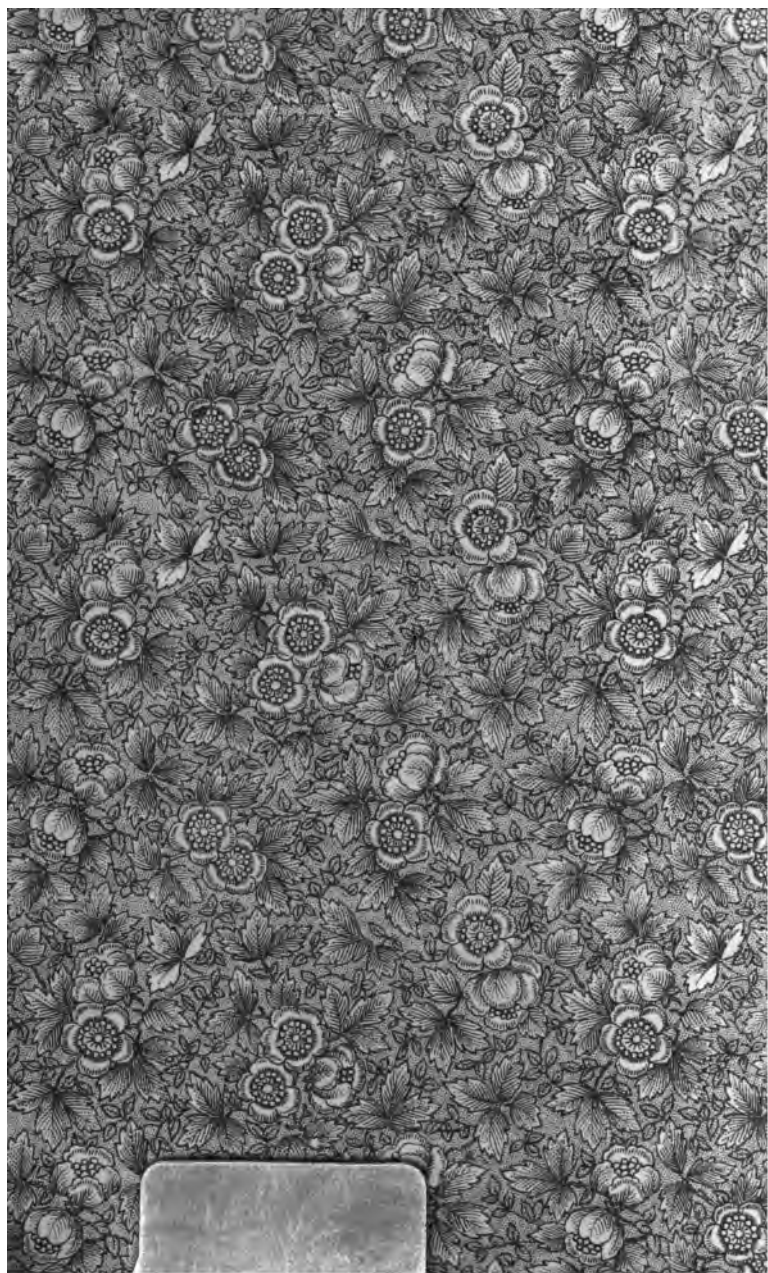
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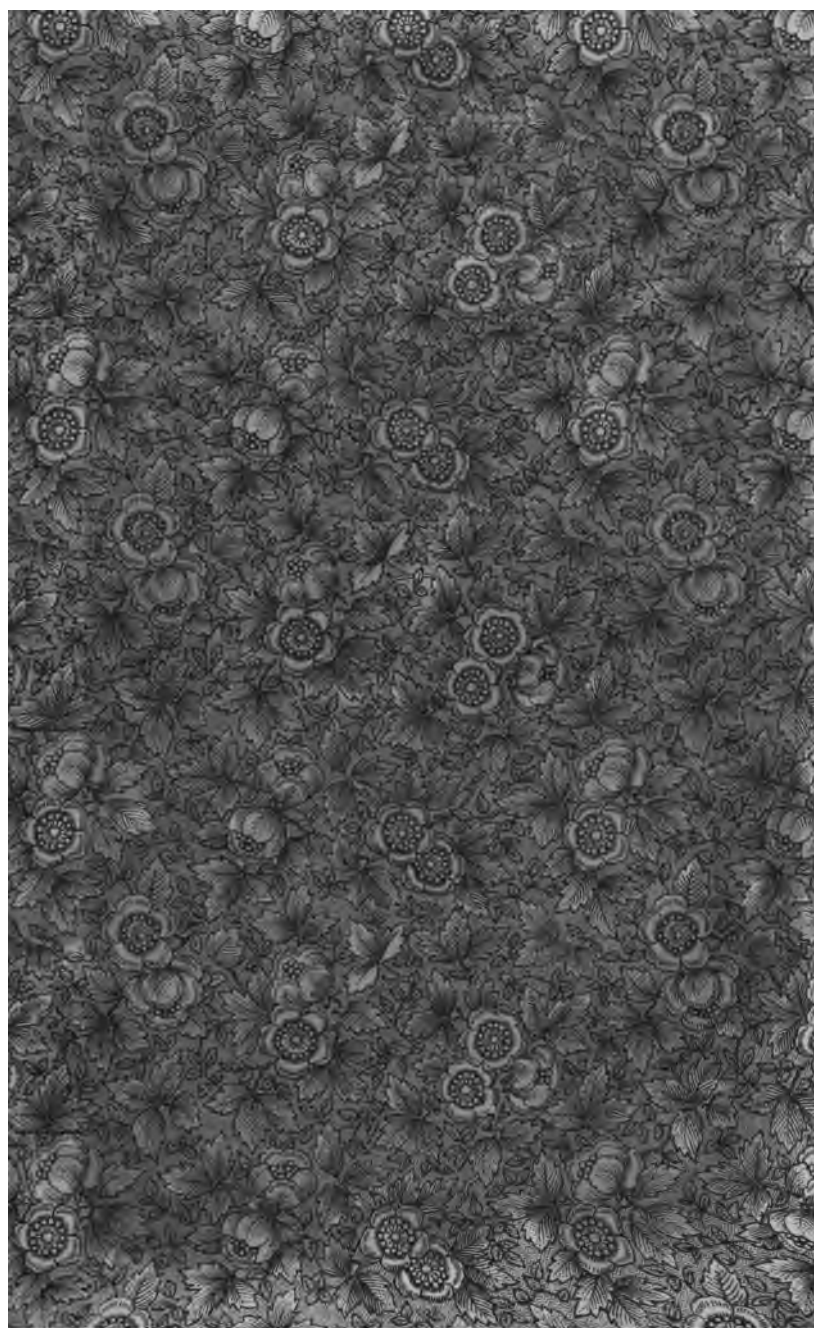
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# A FEARLESS LIFE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THROUGH THE STORM"







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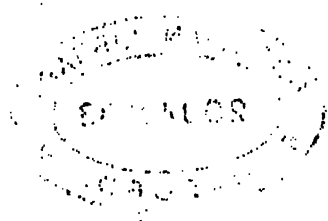
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# A FEARLESS LIFE.

BY

CHARLES QUENTIN,

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH THE STORM," ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.



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TO  
FRIENDS, TRIED AND TRUE,  
THIS BOOK  
IS  
AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.



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# A FEARLESS LIFE.



## CHAPTER I.

### SHALL ALL BE SPOKEN ?

SHE was sitting on the sea-shore, in the calm of an autumn evening. There, to the westward, the sky was all aglow with orange and red, for the setting sun had touched it with its glory. On the bank behind her a few trees stood. Their leaves were quite still in the calm of the evening air, and were cut out clear against the orange sky ; and before her was the ocean. The moon was showing its face over the water's edge.

She stood between day and night—between the glowing passion of youth, which was dying out, and the cold quiet of colourless death.

The big rock she sat on, how many years

she could remember it ! The tides had not washed it away, only left it barer.

“How quiet,” thought she, “is the water to-night, rippling on the smooth, silvery sand, full of light and darkness, of mysterious depths where it hides its tragedies, and of sweet colours and sounds where it woos the dabbling feet of the children ! The fishing-boats are coasting along lazily, while some of the fishers are drawing their nets to shore. And I ? Is it well to add one more to the many stories of troubles ? Others have suffered and been silent, have gone for ever with their mask on, none caring to lift it ; why should not I ?

“The long years demand a voice ; they have been growing clamorous of late, for no piteous appeal for sympathy, no effort at letting the truth be known has given the sadness of those years an issue, and now I hear the voices.

“I should like to die here by the sea-shore, where all my life has been fought out. I hear the dash of the waves through all the past, the grave counsels, the wild desires, the luring hopes, which winds and waters have whispered. I am more closely knit to nature than to any

human soul. Why do I say this? Human souls belong to her, are a part of her, are sometimes warmer and kinder, are sometimes colder and crueller than winds and waves.

“This spirit-thrill which comes, which is with me now as I look into the immensity of space—oh, I see much farther than that line where sea and sky seem to touch—what is it? Will the continuance of it be immortality?

“I should like to tell my tale simply, just as it all happened, and I should like it to be read aloud some summer’s evening—here, on the beach, to all the poor people I have lived amongst. They have known me pretty well, but they would know me better then. Not so good as they thought; and, perhaps, not so bad. Is it possible to tell your own story quite simply and truly? Will not some self-justification creep in? Will you not turn your back on some dark corners and thrust their secrets away; or, in fierce and quite intelligible self-defiance, drag forth the evil and place it in too strong a light, so that the shadows seem darker than they are.

“I walked to and fro in my corner of the world with a false glow of goodness on me for



a time, and then, for a longer time, with a false gloom of badness ; and I want to make it all clear, as clear as anything can be in this world of mistakes, misunderstandings, misuse and misery.

“ Thus far life has left me my undying love for the sweet earth and heavens, as fresh as it was in the early days when I first began to understand them, and it has crushed out all other joy.

“ The shore, with its long stretch of level beach sweeping round in a deep bay, the bold cliffs, projecting at the bay’s extreme points far into the sea, as if to hold in the calm of their embrace this little tract of water, all that my eye now can reach will ever seem home to me. The merry murre, the drifting sea-gull, the chattering martin, carry my thoughts on their wings, and each flutter wafts the past to me.”

So thought Nora Severne, sitting alone by the quiet waters. There was a passionate wail in her heart which thrilled through her, and claimed from the sum of tenderness and pity in all mankind the love which the blindness

of individuals had refused ; but her tale was left to other lips to tell.

After all, it matters but little who speaks, for only now and then in some divine moments do we catch a glimpse of any human soul in its nakedness ; whether we lay it bare ourselves, or leave the task to others, there is always a film on the eyes that see.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE CHANGE OF YEARS.

THE winds sweep wildly over the north coast of Cornwall; the rocks and waves wage eternal warfare. In grim defiance, the great cliffs stand unmoved, while ever in inexhaustible fury the waters break their force and waste their wild raging on the grey heights' invincible strength.

Not most decorously trimmed or enslaved were men likely to be in the face of nature's untamed splendour. It was a rough, wild race that lived at Cairn Cove.

Here came Edgar Severne, blessing the distant cousin who had left him the quiet nook of The Dell. He came hither one bleak winter's day, with his two children, wondering, as he took possession of this home, how it would fare with them there in the years that would come.

Poor Severne ! He had shuffled through life in a strange sort of way. So many people had taken him in hand, and failed to make much of him. They had tried to manage him into the Church, but he had shuffled out of that. It was represented to him that he had not enough to live on, unless he went into a profession. But this did not alarm him ; he lived without a profession. He had no very precise notion of what the world demanded of him, and had always been surprised and awed when any one told him that he had acted in an unusual or eccentric way ; but he quickly forgot, and, so, though easily influenced, he had followed his own impulses again and again, always recognizing with fresh surprise—*when it was pointed out to him*—that the indulgence of those impulses was in opposition to the ordinary rules of social conduct. Severne was a simple soul, who only needed a little quiet and sunshine. He was not an idler, though he had gained the reputation of one early in life, not being minded to do battle in the world for a footing, but loving to work in his own way amongst his books.

So Edgar Severne glided on unoffendingly,

getting what he wanted somehow, in spite of the managing propensities of his friends, till Miss Barbara Dixon resolved that he should marry her sister Catherine.

Not for herself did Miss Dixon for an instant desire the position of Mr. Severne's wife. She had elected to be an old maid. Men were poor creatures. She had kept herself free from them all her life. Some women found men a necessity; she was not one of those, but she was bound to admit that her sister Catherine belonged to that class. Miss Dixon was always snatching this sister out of scrapes, fondly imagining that she snatched her out at the very first step there-into; but at last a faint whisper of Catherine's proclivities began to be wafted to the ears of the neighbourhood, and Barbara, to whom respectability was life, looked round in despair for some means of rescue. Her thoughts lighted on Edgar Severne, unluckily for him.

Short-sighted folks might have imagined that by Miss Dixon—taking into account her strength of mind and decision of purpose—an insignificant man like Severne would be unnoticed. Not so. He was trusting, he was

simple, he was manageable, he was respectable ; he would do.

It was with infinite scorn that Catherine first heard of this scheme, but Barbara was all-powerful. She knew what she knew, and in the publication thereof was comprehended an awful threat. Catherine perchance had a secret of her own. Barbara did not know it, had not the faintest clue to it, but how could Catherine feel sure that she was ignorant of it ? So, out of Barbara's supposed knowledge, and Catherine's real knowledge, the sacrifice of Edgar Severne was decided on.

Two months later he married Catherine Dixon. He was very much surprised when first it was gently confided to him by Barbara that her sister loved him ; he may have even laughed ; but finally he felt it was a point of honour to marry the poor thing, and he did so.

Catherine left her husband a good deal to himself and his books. He had nothing to complain of, except that in an incredibly short space of time he found himself a father ; but in this emergency his usual trustfulness was of great service. He was, perhaps, startled, but

he accepted his position, and in every way fulfilled Barbara's expectations.

Three years after her marriage, Catherine died. Her death was distinctly a relief to her sister's mind ; and while Barbara duly mourned her decease, she also duly congratulated herself that all anxiety from that quarter was at an end, and with Christian patience she recognized the infinite wisdom of a Higher Power.

A few minutes' reflection convinced Miss Dixon that, after the death of her sister, it was her duty to sacrifice her own wishes for the sake of her orphaned niece, and that she ought to offer to live in her brother-in-law's house and bring up the small Catherine.

This all happened in years long gone by, before marriage with a deceased wife's sister had been mooted, and therefore Miss Dixon's position in Severne's house would have been eminently respectable, and would not have awakened the faintest breath of scandal.

Barbara anticipated no resistance to her plan on the part of Edgar Severne. She wrote him a long letter explaining her views, and calmly awaited the result. She even began to pack her possessions previous to removal.

Poor Severne's face, on the receipt of this communication, was pitiable. A most estimable woman, he reflected, but somehow she did not suit him ; it was most unfortunate that she should have thought of this. He could not refuse. How could he refuse ? It was very kind and right of her to wish to take charge of her sister's child. He would not mind letting her have it altogether, but he supposed he could not do this. It would be neglecting his duties ; at least, he had learnt by this time that everything he wished to do was the wrong thing. Yes, he must write, and say that Barbara was very kind, and might come whenever she liked. She would slap Catherine and bring her up to a right understanding of how she ought to appear to other people, whatever she was in reality. She would have his books constantly dusted, and put neatly on shelves where he could never find them. She would keep him accurately informed of the price of coals and flour, and every other detail of the household necessities ; and she would keep in his mind a lively sense of how infinitely her sister had condescended in marrying him, and how much



all his future life ought to be glorified by the remembrance of what a fine woman his wife had been.

All this would, of course, be a great comfort, and yet Severne, with that singular unfitness for practical life which characterized him, shrank from the blessing of Barbara's continual presence. Resistance was impossible; this Edgar recognized at once. He sat with his hands on his knees, gazing helplessly at Barbara's open letter, which lay on the table before him.

The timid have one resource — flight. Animals that cannot defend themselves with tooth and nail are generally fleet of foot; so mused Edgar, with a slight smile on his lips.

Suddenly he got up, took down a map from a book-shelf, ran his finger from the spot where he then lived to the point in England most remote from it, a lovely sea-coast place, and hastily wrote down the name of the village. It seemed delightfully far off, a haven into which Miss Dixon would perhaps not venture to pursue him, could he but reach it before the talons of respectability had finally fixed upon his soul.

Poor Edgar ! What a tender, incapable, quaint, half-boyish face he had ! It looked just now sorely puzzled, but there was in its expression a recognition of the humour of the subject. Perhaps it was this power of seeing the ludicrous side of things which sweetened his isolated life.

For the first time, Severne attempted a little diplomacy. He wrote a very hurried letter to his sister-in-law, thanking her for her kindness, and saying that for the next few days he would be much occupied with business, but that at the end of that time he would write to her more fully. He added that, during those days he would rather not see any one. Then hastily, as hastily as it was possible, he gathered up his books and his baby, and fled.

Miss Dixon, on receipt of Edgar's letter, considered the matter settled ; she had almost considered it so from the first moment that the plan was conceived in her brain. Now she went on rapidly with her preparations, hinting to her intimate friends, when they took notice of a disturbed air in her rooms, that she had a duty to perform, and that she would be a mother to dear Catherine's child.

Barbara was superintending the cording of a box, in which were packed her favourite bits of china, when a second letter came from Severne. This was written from a wild recess on the northern coast, separated from Miss Dixon by several hundred miles of country, over which at this time there was no rapid means of transit.

The letter was not unlike our usual mode of addressing the Almighty. 'It began and went on for some time in a tone of panegyric, reserving its request till the end. The request of Edgar Severne to his sister-in-law was, that she would, in the infinite goodness of her heart, stay away from him. Never could he have reached this pitch of audacity had he been still in the same village with Barbara; but, reflecting on the intervening tract of country, he grew bold as a lion. In a soothing postscript, Edgar added that he would appoint Miss Dixon guardian to the child in the event of his death, and with this she had to be content.

Miss Dixon reflected that it would be madness to leave a place where she was a person of importance to pursue that poor fool Severne

into a desolate hole, where probably there was neither a doctor nor a clergyman; so she locked the letter away, a standing record of her brother-in-law's folly, and looked forward to the day when the Lord should see fit to call such a useless and incapable creature to Himself.

Edgar's new home was a little red brick cottage, in which he had hired two rooms, having persuaded the landlady to take his child under her care. He liked the place at once. He walked into the little sitting-room, and stood by the window with a sense of having been familiar with it all for long years. Was the place going to bring him joy? Perhaps the atmosphere of coming happiness wafted into his soul a throb of love and peace.

He sat down and took the toddling Catherine, holding her at arm's length, and looking eagerly into her small face. Would she grow a delight and comfort to him? It was not a pleasant child's face. The eyes were pale, and had an expression of cunning, the features had no promise of beauty, and there was a strange look of age on the young roundness of form.

Severne was so earnest and grave in his gaze that the child howled dismally. He instantly loosed her and went out. It was not from that source that he could expect pleasure. He decided that day that he could not love this child ; but he was very kind to her, and in the months that followed he encouraged her to be with him, allowing her to come into his room when he was at work, and he even bore, on one occasion, without an angry word, the tearing up of some sheets of translation, which had been the work of weeks. They did not take to one another, this lone man and wee child, and were gradually less and less together.

Here, in this peaceful village, free from the management of Miss Dixon, and comparatively content with his books, Edgar Severne lived for a year ; then there came another event in his simple life. He married a little milliner in the village, who was trying to support life on about five shillings a week, which was extracted in small sums from the Sunday bonnets which her skilful fingers made for the villagers.

Edgar Severne saw her, talked to her, spent Sunday afternoons with her by the river side,

found that the thought of her intruded itself constantly into his studies and interrupted him somewhat, reflected tenderly on her sweet face and hard life, and finally married her, thinking that for her comfort and the continuance of his work, it was best this question should be set at rest. They were horribly poor, but this sort of suffering never affected Edgar very much; he only grieved for his wife's discomfort. He taught a little at the high remuneration of a shilling a lesson. It is true that he might have increased the actual wages of his tuitions by dining at his pupils' houses, but this he always declined to do. His wife continued to make bonnets, which perhaps were more successful pieces of decoration now that the daily struggle of life was shared by a man she loved. By-and-by another girl was added to the household. After this, for three years they remained together, and, though very poor, were by no means unhappy. At the end of that time Nora Severne died. The little milliner had a brave spirit, but continual privation wore out her body. Countless times, when her beloved Edgar was out, she set aside the best dinner she could get for him,

and contented herself with a piece of bread. But there is always an end to that sort of self-sacrifice, and it came. Shortly after Nora's death a distant cousin of Severne's died, and left him a small annuity and The Dell—that little place which can be seen through the trees on the right, as you stand on the cliffs at Cairn Cove.

Fortune timed her kindly gift thus, when the hand would not be too eagerly outstretched for it. She often does.

Severne was unwilling to leave the bare lodging which he had grown accustomed to, but it had to be done; so once more he gathered up his books, and came with his two children to The Dell. A little more sad and gentle grew Edgar's face after the death of the wife he loved, a little more frail his body; but there was no word of complaint ever on his lips. The children grew and developed, while their father faded, borne on the ebb of time.

Nora was the constant companion of her father. She would creep into his study, apparently unnoticed by him, seat herself on the ground and keep silence, holding a book in her hand, even before she could read, in

ludicrous imitation of Edgar. She was not a babbling or merry child, but always had a thoughtful wonderment in her eyes, which made her face interesting. Catherine was as free to come to the study as Nora, but she did not avail herself much of the privilege, and when there her presence seemed to affect Nora in the most fatal way ; the child seemed to change her nature, to be noisy, irritable, whimpering. This never appeared to be the fault of Catherine ; and therefore the word of reproof, which sometimes came from Edgar's lips, was always addressed to Nora, and merely increased her unruliness. After a while, Edgar would take his book and walk away. He never exercised his authority, he never resisted anything ; his was a strange, dreamy nature, making no effort to fit itself to other men's notions.

The two children were treated with strict impartiality ; the sole difference in their education was that Edgar taught Nora, and the village schoolmistress taught Catherine. From her father, Nora learnt a great many beautiful tales about brave and noble men and women ; and her first outlook into this mysterious



world was coloured by the lesson that she was a little creature of no great importance, who had to try and make her life beautiful by her own thoughts and deeds, if it were to be fair and sweet like the kind earth, and that, being rich or poor, sad or merry, forgotten or caressed, had nothing to do with the beauty of it.

Catherine, by her teacher, was duly instructed in everything which it was proper she should think, and her acts were all referred to the strict standard of having been born a lady, and to the infallible judgment of what people would say.

The two teachers were admirably suited to the minds they had to deal with, and were fit exponents of two very different systems.

Perhaps Edgar Severne had soon understood the possibilities in the children's natures. So gentle and silent, he saw much more perhaps than people credited him with seeing, and knew that no amount of culture could make Catherine understand the art of life as he understood it; therefore, with his old and consistent peculiarity, he may have shrunk from resisting her nature. Perhaps he felt

that Nora, being born of love, was nearer the heart of beauty, and therefore gifted with sight and understanding which could never be Catherine's. No one knew much what Severne thought. He never explained himself, and was very undemonstrative, even to Nora. Sometimes, towards dusk, he was to be seen walking through the village, holding Nora by the hand ; his slight form stooping a little, his long coat and knee-breeches well brushed, but always rather worn and threadbare. He seldom spoke to his child, or noticed the passers-by unless they saluted him. Sometimes a labourer would say, "Good evening, master," then he would lift his head and return the greeting, his whole face lighting up with a warm, kindly expression, which showed him by no means indifferent to his fellow-men. He was free from want now, but never rich, for every appeal for help was promptly answered ; and when the little store ran low, he never found it any privation to do without things for himself. He was admired and respected by some few simple people ; but by those whose minds had been trained, so to say, religiously, and who looked

upon their position in the world as due to their merits and propriety, all this unpretending goodness of Edgar Severne's was considered as the work of the devil, as a mask to cover an uneasy conscience on which rested, perhaps, the guilt of some secret crime. Many little things strengthened this conviction in the minds of the respectable. A clergyman's gown seen in his room by a servant; his constant study of heathen books; his refusal to allow Nora to be religiously instructed by the village pastor; the information volunteered by Catherine that her sister Nora knew nothing of the Bible—all these facts, with a host of others equally weighty, pointed to some mystery. Severne had been probably unfrocked for his evil ways; he was an atheist; he had sold himself to the devil; and at length a certain set of people in this lonely country, notably those who had what is termed an assured position, saw in Edgar Severne's simple, dreamy face the expression of a murderer, an adulterer, a blasphemer, a pirate—nay, of a whole calendar of criminals!

All unheeding, Edgar trod his way through life. Between him and his little Nora there

gradually grew a companionship of thought which did not find much vent in words. Sometimes, in the bright summer time, when her little heart was overflowing with contentment, she would come with her pinafore full of daisies, and sit on the window-sill of her father's study, making daisy-chains, and singing, as she made them, little scraps of songs—some picked up from the fishermen, some which were bits of ballads, seen in some old book of her father's, and which she put to rambling melodies of her own. All were broken fragments of music, sweet as a bird's song, and as unconsciously free and happy. On these days, Edgar would cease his studies and watch her with a yearning look in his patient eyes, and a smile on his lips, which was sadder than tears. What troubled thoughts passed through his brain, what he feared or hoped for, no one knew. There were only the children to speak to, and how could they understand? Perhaps at rare moments, when Nora would stand by his side, her little hand resting on his knee, some inexplicable understanding of his soul thrilled through her child's heart, for she would draw a little closer to him and look

questioningly in his eyes. Perhaps in those early days some of the shadow of the mystery of life fell on her, some of the unacknowledged struggle and unspoken sadness was read and remembered, bringing through the after years, even as a phrase of sad music, a thrill of unexplained pain.

The respectability of The Dell, the worldly position and dignity of the owners, was fittingly supported only by Catherine. At an early age all the moralities and proprieties were concentrated in her small person. She displayed a due regard for appearances, on which rest success, virtue, and a thousand social qualities altogether admirable. She liked her own enjoyment and compassed it. This also is an essential to those who would pass through the world reasonably, without morbid fancies or exaggerated ideals. Forbidden sweets, forbidden knowledge, Catherine gained decorously, and who could blame her? The early practice of not showing the under side of anything is most useful, and Catherine learnt its value very soon. She was never at a disadvantage from too keen a sense of honour. A slight pause outside a door when

she heard voices, a cautious glance into a letter, which was carelessly left on a table, amused her, and did not hurt any one ; for she was not a babbler, and was content to gain information, as well as other things, for herself alone.

There was one element in Catherine's character which threatened to disturb the consistency of her life, and by its undue preponderance to spoil the well-regulated smoothness of her manners ; this was her hatred for Nora. Though the latter was far behind her in accomplishments, and was less indulged in her fancies, yet Catherine was jealous of her. Though Severne's manner to the two children was apparently similar, yet Catherine detected that he did not love her. A mind totally lacking in some quality, quickly discovers the want of it in another. She did not try to win Edgar's love—that was too unsatisfactory a course to pursue ; she contented herself with skilfully bringing into prominence all that was unlovable in Nora, and she succeeded admirably in this sort of negative self-justification. Nora's undemonstrativeness seemed heartless ; her gay little

laugh at things ridiculous seemed an ungraceful mockery ; all her childish carelessness seemed slovenly indelicacy, in Catherine's presence. Under the influence of her words and looks, Nora seemed a spoiled, petulant child. The contrast between the two grew stronger as years went by. Catherine had all that *savoir faire*, which is the armour of the worldly. Nora's tact was the tact of the heart, not the head. The only laws of her young life were love and honour ; her only culture, the constant influence of her father's refinement and the thoughts of the great men whom he worshipped.

When Nora was ten years old, and Catherine was fourteen, Edgar Severne's last link with health and vigour snapped, and he was laid low by a stroke of paralysis. Then came the advent of Miss Dixon. Nora had never heard of her, and looked at her for many days in wide-eyed wonderment, a wonderment which speedily turned to dislike ; for Miss Dixon took the complete management of Edgar Severne, and only admitted the children to his room at stated times, and this with rigorous impartiality. At first, Nora entreated to be allowed


to see her father constantly ; but finding her request denied, she made no wail about it, but took the matter into her own hands. She eluded Miss Dixon's vigilance, and went in and out of her father's room with the noiselessness and subtlety of a serpent. Sometimes she was detected, but often she lay hidden in a corner or glided out behind Miss Dixon's back unnoticed. Whenever Nora was detected she was punished, but she made no complaint. She took her punishment silently, sometimes with a slight smile on her lips ; and never did she allow her father to suspect that she suffered for her devotion to him.

How keen and clear are some scenes of childish days, cut out sharply by the unblunted edge of emotion on the white background of youth ! There was one such which would be vivid to Nora through all her days.

It was a winter's afternoon, with keen air and fading light. There was a red glow in the sky from the setting sun, but it was hard and cruel in its beauty. Nora was sitting at the foot of her father's bed, motionless. Sometimes she watched him as he lay there with



closed eyes, sometimes she turned her gaze through the window on the cold landscape without. She thought her father slept, and her breathing was almost stilled lest she should wake him. A multitude of thoughts on the mysteries of life and death floated through her young brain. Nameless fears, nameless desires, and nameless hopes came and went, wavering and changing in form like a flame in the blast. She looked out and saw the bare arms of the trees, and on a bough close to the window-pane a bird, with ruffled plumage and a pitiful air of misery. Up against the cruel redness of the sky, she saw a hawk chasing a little bird, and heard the sharp cry for its blood, while from the distance came the deep roar of the sea. And as Nora looked and listened, the first knowledge of the devouring powers of nature came into her soul; the first sense of the pitiless, inexorable law of destruction thrilled through her young flesh with a curdling horror. Then her eyes sought her father's face, and for an instant she could not see him. She had been gazing out, not noticing the coming darkness, and now it had filled the room. She gave a little start, but in a minute



she could see more clearly and knew that her father was looking at her.

"Child," he said quietly, "I wish I could take you with me; I am going away soon."

Her eyes opened wider and her hands clasped her knees, but she did not speak.

"I am afraid, my little Nora," he said slowly, "that you'll not have a nice time of it; but I can't help it. If one lives in the world, perhaps it's best to be worldly—I don't know. I could not manage it, neither will you, dear."

He spoke very slowly and his voice was weak, but he went on, half as if talking to himself.

"There's always an end to the dullest story, and I'm coming to the end of mine. There have been some quiet hours, some happy hours; at least, I'm not sure, for what is a pleasure now was a dread then—the end. So it's never quite smooth at any time, is it?"

Nora spoke no word. She came to the head of his bed and, standing there, stroked back his thin hair gently; now and then she stooped and kissed his forehead.

"No, dear, I'd rather you were not worldly.

Try and have some ideas of your own, no matter what comes of it. It saves trouble to go with the crowd, I know ; but some are not made like that. You'll make a better fight than I did—you have more backbone. Then there's plenty of good company—Jesus, Socrates, Dante, and many another ; it would be too greedy, besides their love, to want the sympathy and approval of the village doctor and parson."

His eyes smiled. He enjoyed his little joke, but it was too great an effort to his lips to laugh.

"No, dear," he added, "we must discriminate."

There was silence for a little while ; the room had grown quite dark, except for a faint glow from the fire, which had burnt low. Nora did not notice it ; she was looking at her father, and she could just see his eyes, which seemed unusually bright.

After a pause he continued to speak—

"You don't understand much now, but you will remember?"

"Yes."

"After all, looking back, it's not long.

Don't forget, it's not long, and if things are hard——”

“I can bear them,” Nora interrupted hastily.

“Yes. I couldn't. I had no pluck. I never bore anything; but I've nearly finished that translation, and I took care of *her*, and——”

Nora's hand, resting on her father's head, felt a quiver pass through him. She looked at him closely, the features seemed suddenly changed, his face had a strange look.

One second of scared indecision and then Nora rushed for Miss Dixon. Neither she nor any other mortal could give much help. This was the second inroad of the great conqueror; he had made a stride this time.

Edgar Severne did not die at once, but his life for the next few months was little better than death. Only from his eyes did the living soul look out; speech and motion were at an end for him for ever.

They blamed Nora. She had let the fire die out, and the room get cold; she had allowed her father to talk and excite himself; she had been careless, and so hastened this second stroke of paralysis. Miss Dixon's reproaches

did not affect Nora, she did not torture herself with remorse ; she felt quietly sure—though she made no protest against these accusations—that she had done the best thing, had let her father speak when he wished. The rest was insignificant. No trifling act could have hastened or retarded his cruel illness. Had he not said he was going away ? They told her she was not fit to watch by him. They tried to keep her away ; but every night, when Miss Dixon and Catherine were in bed and the servant sat up with Severne, his little daughter stole in and sat by his pillow through the dark hours. The servant told no tales, and night after night the watcher came. Sometimes, very tired, she dropped asleep, and her young head fell on the pillow by her father's side. He had no words to bless her, no power to caress her, but in his eyes was concentrated such depths of tenderness, that at times, when the rough country girl, who was his night-nurse, looked at him, the tears gathered in her eyes—she knew not why.

It was at night that Edgar died. His death was as quiet, as unobtrusive as his life. It was only Nora who saw him die. The servant

had fallen asleep in the arm-chair by the fire ; so they took their farewell without onlookers.

It was a moment set apart for ever, by its mystery and sacredness, in Nora's young life , a moment which could never be lost or forgotten in the past or the future ; a moment of perfect love and perfect pain.

When it was ended, Nora roused the servant.

" I think," she said firmly, though her lips quivered, " that my father has left us."

## CHAPTER III.

### NATURE'S FOSTERLING.

EDGAR SEVERNE had been absolutely destitute of friends. This may account for his having left his children to the guardianship of Miss Dixon ; or he may have felt himself bound by his promise respecting Catherine, and not have known how to provide for the separate care of Nora. Perhaps Severne recognized at the last Barbara's admirable qualities, and resolved to do them justice. This recognition may be assigned to an intellect weakened by the approach of death, or informed by the approach of eternity. The question will be decided differently by differing minds.

Erratic and incomprehensible through life, Severne maintained that character to the last.

Why should we try to sift men's motives ?

Do we always know what we mean ? Can we always choose ?

Nora would have preferred being left to the guardianship of the devil (who is always supposed ready to offer himself for any vacancy of the kind), or of any of the fish-wives of the village, rather than to the care of Miss Dixon, towards whom, in the years that followed, her feelings in no wise changed. Nora disliked her, hated being forced to live with her, but found a kind of consolation in thinking that she knew all the sham of her, and also in conveying subtly to Miss Dixon by the expression of her eyes or the corners of her lips that she had found her out.

Miss Dixon was convex in form ; all pompous people tend to that shape. Those who are totally lacking in self-importance incline to the concave ; there is a retreating appearance about them which haunts them through life. Miss Dixon was always apologetic when she spoke of Nora, and specially pompous when she spoke of Catherine. She insisted much on birth, high-breeding, generations of refinement, gently pointing to the conclusion that she and her niece Catherine



were products therefrom, while Nora was put in evidence as the consequence of a *més-alliance*.

There certainly was little in the two girls to indicate that they sprang from the same stem.

Nora, to most eyes, was unnoticeable. She was like a reed in the wind: she had a wild, blown look about her; eyes that had a searching wonder, lips that were touched with a sort of scorn—they were lips that quivered, but kept their secrets—a long, round throat, almost too small, a figure slender to a fault. There was nothing in her appearance to please the eyes of a woman like Miss Dixon; certainly nothing in her manner or words to touch that stagnant organ which Miss Dixon called her heart.

Catherine, on the other hand, fulfilled her aunt's wishes in every respect, bloomed into roundness and redness, and altogether did justice to her position and material comforts. She shared Miss Dixon's views respecting Nora, and thought of her with a dislike which could, at any moment, grow to hatred, for a feeling, the cause of which we attribute to

the nature or acts of others, varies in intensity with the occasion given to it for development.

There might have been slightly more harmony between these three women had it not been for that fatal curve in Nora's lips, which expressed her sense of the ridiculous, and robbed Miss Dixon and Catherine of their dignity and importance in some inexplicable way.

Nora's education had been left in her own hands after her father's death, and it proceeded in an unusual fashion. The sunshine and the winds had more to do with it than anything else, had a stronger power than books, though they were often united in their influence; for Nora, mindful that her father had been a scholar, loved books, made them her companions, took them with her to the shore, to the rocks, to the moor, and made them speak to her in her solitude. Sometimes she found them uncongenial, and laid them down; sometimes she lacked the key to unlock their meaning, having dreamed too much and lived too little. She set herself to master Latin, having a vague idea that it was the basis of all culture, and toiled at it perseveringly. She felt knowledge to be power. She wanted to

have the mental strength of a man, if she could not gain the bodily strength. She saw no beauty in womanhood ; her recollections of her father included all that she knew in actual life of what was admirable.

Nora started out on her girlish life—her early summer-time, which ought to have been all beauty and joy—with a great loneliness, a great unsatisfied craving for love, with a set of notions gathered here and there from so-called profane writers, men who lived in a state of society differing considerably from that of Cairn Cove early in the nineteenth century, and a total unfitness for the grooves of conventional life. No one helped her ; no one led her. She was clear-sighted enough to recognize that the thoughts which sprang from her simple life and the words of the great, were purer, honester than the thoughts which swayed the acts of others, and so she dwelt on her favourite fancies, and began to invest them with immutable rightness. She saw no reason why she should not take the guidance of her own life and mould it as freely as any man fashions his. For good or ill she resolved to direct her own steps, and not to accept joy or

sorrow as others chose to mete it out to her. This decision, possible to carry out in part now, since freedom of thought has crept into the quietest homes, was a somewhat more startling matter some eighty years ago. Now mediocrity struggles to be singular, and on all sides people break bounds. Then, the line was drawn rigidly between class and class, and the life suitable to social position was clearly defined; gradually old barriers have been removed. The shifting time, though necessary, is an ugly one: a time for fools to wave standards which they do not understand the meaning of; a time for the weak-headed to defy public opinion, when they have no motive for defying it, and are so insignificant that public opinion concerns itself not at all with what they do or think; a time for a pretence of liberality and strength; but, no doubt, a useful time into which very great and calm spirits have been born to grasp the good and mould it into form, and leave it a real truth and glory to coming generations.

In quiet places like Cairn Cove, men keep on old lines for a long time, and remain, in a certain sense, immature. They broke the ten

commandments there as elsewhere ; but their evil deeds and repentance were qualified by accepted laws and traditions, which were bowed to as complete and final. There were here, as in all places and at all times, the idle and vicious—those who live on others from lack of energy, or prey on others from corrupted energy ; but there was also the great mass of workers—the workers not far off in the dark depths of the silent earth, the workers on the noisy ocean. These gave to Cairn Cove a character of its own ; these, and the wild face of nature, both in endless struggle and yet endless harmony. There were brave scenes and sad scenes in the mine and on the wave ; hours when souls cast off the rags of selfishness and habit, and asserted in the face of all conquering nature their claim to the unconquerable ; hours when all classes were exalted by the power of emotion, and were worthy of life.

How seldom are we worthy of life ! Surely not when the days float past us without our leaving one mark on them of noble thought or deed, without their bringing one gleam of mental light ; when we are worn by a host of petty anxieties ; when we are occupied by

a host of minor duties, to which we give the first place, and which we swell into preposterous importance.

Nora's time was not all passed in study or in loneliness ; she had her play, too. Lives must be linked to lives by love or hate or some human feeling ; books cannot be all. There are times when they neither soothe nor instruct. Some bright moving things, lips and eyes that smile, feet that dance, must save us from the infinite and circumscribe thought. Under all conditions youth will play ; even in squalor and wretchedness it will find some joy. Nora found vulgarity and pretension at home, amongst the so-called refined and cultivated. She sought life and kindness amongst the so-called vulgar and common. She learnt to row from one of the fishermen ; she learnt to spin and weave from one of their wives. Some little money Edgar had left to Nora for her separate use, something to play with, and for which she need not apply to her guardian. Thus furnished, she was able to take a boat sometimes, and exercise her skill in rowing. She grew familiar with the sea, learning its moods, and loving it even better than she had

done when she had only watched it from the shore. Nora could call many of the children in the village by name, knew that one girl's sweetheart was in Australia, and that another girl's lover had been lost at sea. Long before she had courage to make friends with any of them she knew their life and occupations, for she would wander about watching them, would see them making or mending their nets, building their houses or their boats. She loved to watch the artisans at their work, to see the skill of their hands from long practice ; to see a mason build a wall and fit the stones adroitly ; to see a carpenter shave the wood as fine as tissue paper, never dipping his plane deeper at one place than another for a yard's length ; to see the thatcher lay the straw on the cottage roof and trim it off neatly at the edge. Nora longed to do it all herself, it seemed delightful to her to be one of them.

Nora's faculty of observation was quickened by the life she led. Her mind, during these early years, took in all it could reach to, and gave but little signs of its own imaginings, and thus the days passed till she had reached sixteen.

## CHAPTER IV.

## A SHEPHERD IN THE LAND.

MISS CATHERINE SEVERNE had, in the years that had gone by since her father's death, developed into a tall girl, with a figure which seemed to defy criticism, and a face which was handsome but not at all beautiful. She was now nearly twenty, and had entered upon her woman's heritage of admiration, flattery, hypocrisy; and had polished her woman's armour of respect for appearances till it shone so brightly as to be the edification of the aristocracy of Cairn Cove. She loved pleasure, and realized very early the wisdom of not letting slip her opportunities. There was an easy good nature in her face, which made her popular.

When men wear an expression of having interests and thoughts apart from their neighbours, they are never pleasant companions to



those who look round them for entertainment. In this particular Catherine did not err. She was ready to be interested in every one to a quite satisfactory degree ; prompt, too, in the forwarding of their wishes in any line which did not make a tangle with her own desires.

Nora being nearly four years her junior, Catherine treated her as so much a child that their paths must be quite apart, and generally used the authoritative or condescending tone when speaking to her. Nora's perverse assumption of ignorance as to that which was correct or incorrect for a young lady to do was a constant thorn in Catherine's side, and many schemes for her reform were planned between Catherine and her aunt. They were strangely unsuccessful. Not that Nora revolted, but she never recognized the authority or power of Miss Dixon, listened with a sort of scornful amusement to her lectures, and pursued her own course in spite of punishment. Subjection is possible through love or fear. Miss Dixon could not influence Nora by either the one or other ; so she and Catherine consoled themselves, under the trying circumstances of having such a relation, by a constant reference to her delin-

quencies, and the consequent discovery that their opinion of her perfectly coincided. Nora seldom spoke in their presence without provoking a quick glance from one, which said, "There, I told you so," responded to by a look from the other, which said as plainly, "Yes, so I've always thought." Quite honestly they grew to think that Nora's every act and word was studied for their special annoyance, and thus they mutually fanned the flame of their dislike for her. They deemed Nora's vulgarity one of her most fatal defects. Of course they had expected it, looked for it, as one looks for apples on an apple tree; but they had hoped that, brought up as a lady, she would not have developed it quite so strongly. Her taste for low society was unconquerable; and as she always fled from the face of visitors, she no doubt recognized in herself an unfitness to be with ladies.

In truth, Nora was guiltless of any desire, wilfully, to annoy the women she lived with, for Miss Dixon and Catherine did not enter into her life as yet—seemed no part of her. She was growing up a little lonely waif, more a part of the winds and waves than anything

else, with her passions of love and hatred, and all their resultant emotions still sleeping, untouched by life ; glad of the sunshine and the breeze, eager to know things, eager to do, but too open-eyed at the immensity beyond and around her to take any decided step to wisdom unaided, and there seemed little help for her in the life she was born to. Nature does not adapt human creatures to the soil in which they grow, whatever may be her wisdom in the vegetable kingdom ; or is it that we are blind as to the life that is best for the development of character ?

The neighbourhood of Cairn Cove was meagre in population, still it was possessed of elements which kept its small circle of human life astir with pain and pleasure. There was the squire, an occasional visitant, who carried in his person a scent of far-off cities of wealth and fashion, and of mysterious crimes and delights untasted by rurals. The possibility of attracting his notice, of winning his attention, nay, even the vision of his finding in a simple country heart a haven after the deception of the world, floated ever before the minds of the women and gilded the horizon of their hopes.

He stirred, too, the breasts of the men with various emotions, as such a great man should do, being considered, at times when he asked them to dinner, an uncommonly gentlemanly fellow, and at other times a conceited ass, when he ignored their existence. Then, in different degrees of importance, came the village clergyman and the village doctor; the widow who never wearied of talking of the days when she was in different circumstances; the last member of a decayed genteel family, who had let himself down by marrying a schoolmistress; and the first representative of a would-be genteel family, who had raised himself up by amassing money and ignoring his antecedents. Such people were to be found at Cairn Cove. The family abounds, and more or less distinguished members of it are to be discovered in town and country; they link themselves into all human history, and help or hinder lives of more definite shape.

The Rev. Simeon Moore, the minister, as he was called, of Cairn Cove, was not a man to be overlooked in the position for which he considered that the Almighty had specially selected him. He was a scrupulous master of religious

ceremonies ; ushered people out of the world in the most orthodox way, with an air of introducing them to a kingdom with which he was thoroughly acquainted ; received infants into the bosom of the Church with an unction of manner which was very edifying, and seemed, to the emotional hearts of the mothers, to make saints at once of their india-rubber faced babies. As he always said what every one expected him to say, and went through his work with scrupulous adherence to the rubric—distinguishing between the evil and the good with traditional discernment—his religious position was unassailable, and he carried due weight in the neighbourhood.

Outwardly, the Rev. Simeon Moore had a becomingly professional appearance, and was preserved from the snares of personal beauty. He had a long, a very long upper lip, full of the confidence of duty done and the enjoyment, in all humility, of his dues of this world's comforts. His eyes were very small and of a greenish yellow, and had a habitual expression of having penetrated the mysteries of life, which had saddened but had not tainted him. His face was crowned by a forehead of such

ample proportions and gradually receding height, that physiognomists of ordinary powers of discernment, however doubtful of the indications of the lower part of the face, could not but see in that lofty brow the impress of a great soul.

With a mind fixed on higher things, Mr. Simeon Moore did not give much attention to personal adornment; not more than once a week did he deem it needful to shave, and in the interim his face presented the appearance of an undusted table. Add to the above details, hands very white and puffy, with fingers flattened at the tips, and the Rev. Simeon Moore's chief external characteristics are complete. He had received a college education, and in those days this fact carried weight. Even now, when the spread of education might give us an opportunity of recognizing that the bare acquirement of facts does not make a man gifted with natural stupidity the less, but the greater fool, we are always ready to defer to the man who speaks of his university.

The poor of his parish had a vague notion that the parson had read the Bible in the

original, which meant to them the language that God spoke, and of course he knew all about it; they accordingly committed the care of their souls to him contentedly, with the practical reflection that they had no learning, and that it was his business and not theirs.

The gentry of Cairn Cove invited the Rev. Simeon Moore to their houses, partly because there were not many people to ask, and partly because they supposed that, being a university man, he must be fit to be spoken to. So thus supported by poor and rich, his lines lay in pleasant places.

Oh, the happiness of self-satisfied lives! Earth and air, men and events, minister to their well-being, while they have the sweet consciousness of feeling that all is due to their superior merits.

Long ago, in the first dignity of the black gown, Simeon had persuaded a young enthusiastic girl that the divine light shone with peculiar brilliancy in him, and he espoused her with due ecclesiastical solemnity; but by-and-by, in the closeness of domestic life and worries, the divine light grew dim to her, and after considerable weariness and ill health she

died, leaving to her husband one boy. This boy Allan was now twenty, destined by his father for the Church; destined by his own desires, if they proved strong enough, for an erratic, artistic, disreputable existence. Nature revenges herself on cant sometimes.

Allan had been at school at Exeter, where his chief ally was the greatest scamp in the school, and this friendship bid fair to continue through life.


Simeon Moore did not send his son to college, for he considered that his own attainments were quite sufficient to enable him to complete Allan's education. There was another reason, and perhaps a more powerful one, for not sending Allan to a university. Money Simeon looked on religiously as a trust to be guarded with care; and he was never led into the sin of prodigality. The expense of maintaining Allan at Oxford or Cambridge would not have been slight, so Simeon conscientiously refrained from such extravagance; and as virtue is ever its own reward, by this self-denial he saved his money and also had the happy reflection that he had done his duty.

Allan had a very ready mind. The boy was



quick at everything, managed to learn in spite of his father's teaching, was full of enthusiasm about nature, art, life, and consequently was very teachable. Upon his father he did not as yet exercise his reflective powers much. It is strange how little we look on our parents as distinct personalities, as characters to be criticized apart from their relation to us, unless they so cross our wills as to come into active antagonism with us.

A father was to Allan Moore, in the earlier stages of his manhood, a sort of institution based on social order since the foundation of the world, varying a little in nature according to the profession he held. His father was a clergyman; therefore he was as he was, and Allan dreamed not of sitting in judgment on his ways or doings. Simeon Moore did not interfere much with his son's amusements, asked no questions as to what he did when out of his sight. Of course, his son would follow in his steps, would study, pass his examinations, be ordained, and try in every way to imitate his father, whom he had always seen to be respected and admired in his parish. He did not much like his being



so intimate with Guy Clifford, a youth who seemed to have no regard for his reputation. That sort of selfish recklessness about what was said of him, was a failing in which Simeon trusted his son would never indulge. Of course, when a man is young the temptations of the flesh and the devil are very strong ; but a youth properly brought up ought, if he should be led astray, to show sufficient consideration for others to hide his slips and be ashamed of them. He himself had erred perhaps, but he did not fling his errors in the face of the public, and so have his mistakes branded upon him all his life. He had followed the sacred precept to avoid all *appearance* of evil.

When Simeon was with his son, he alluded constantly to his future career, talked of Allan helping him in his parish, and pointed out how he might afterwards attain to eminence in the Church, and become, perhaps, a bishop, which position—though specially qualified for it—his father had been prevented from reaching by being tied to an obscure parish, where his talents were hidden and where pecuniary necessity obliged him to remain.

For some years the Church seemed such a

distant prospect to Allan, that it was not unpleasant to him to speak of it as his future profession. As the time drew near when he must enter it, he felt uncomfortable, but did not seriously contemplate resisting his father's wishes. He put the thought of it away as much as possible, as we do with most disagreeable thoughts when we are young, finding enough delight in the warm thrill of youth, in untrodden paths, in ever new sensations, to fill our minds to overflowing, and leave but little space for lengthened worry.

Compared with the gaieties of a youth of London, or even of a large provincial town, Allan's amusements might seem tame. Twenty pounds a year, sent most regularly by a godfather who had never seen Allan, made him—considering the requirements of a resident at Cairn Cove—a man of independence. For five pounds a year he persuaded a farmer to let him take possession of a loft over one of his out-houses, and also to allow him to knock out part of the wall and put a large window into it. This feat, Allan and his friend Guy Clifford accomplished together, taking great pride in their work, though the wind blew strong

through divers unfilled chinks ; and they often watched with anxiety in a storm, lest the whole window-frame should be blown in.

Here, in the delightful expansiveness of youth, Moore and Clifford reconstructed the world—the latter legislating on the greatest happiness principle ; the former modifying these laws by theories of noble ends to be striven for, exalted ideals to be wrought out, growing eager and enthusiastic about it all, and illustrating his arguments by reference to art and literature and things he knew very little about, being listened to by Guy—who knew still less—laughingly but admiringly.

“I think,” said Guy, one of these days, “that from the age of twenty to thirty-five, the chief thing a fellow ought to do is to enjoy himself. Clearly the world is made for us ; and it’s only the damned selfishness of some people, who want to have everything for themselves, which spoils the pleasure of others.”

“There are plenty of other things to spoil life,” said Allan, “and to prevent us taking it easily ; things we try for and fail in, and break our hearts over. Then, unluckily, two or three people may want the same thing—a

woman, for instance—and what's to be done? Then there's always death to take away something you love. I don't see how you are to guarantee a man happiness from twenty to thirty-five, even if no one wilfully interferes with him."

Clifford yawned, stretched himself, threw the remnant of an orange he had been eating at Moore's head, missed his aim, and went on with the conversation.

"You always do take a gloomy view, old chap. I'll back you against the world for that talent. But now, let's take your arguments for misery in inverted order, as they say at school. Death! well, we can't get over that, more's the pity; but, as we know that fact from the first start, why should we let it spoil our fun? We don't feel most people's death half as much as we pretend to; and if by bad luck some one dies whom we can't do without, why we can go sharp after him or her, as the case may be—it would be *her* in my case."

"There might be some one else in the world you would wish to stay for."

"Oh, well, if your heart is merely divided into compartments with some one in each, I

think you may live on, and not kick up a row about your misery because one compartment is cleared out."

"It might be your duty to stay, however much you loathed life."

"Duty! ah, I should not stop to think of that! I never turn myself inside out with questions and reflections. I act at once; it's much the best way. There, I consider the bugbear of death is disposed of; let us go on. Suppose we want the same woman, I could never be made wretched by that sort of thing. Any woman who is young, pretty, and good-tempered is equally fascinating to me."

"Every man is not so impartial in his tastes as you are, Clifford!"

"No; but you can always find out in time whether the coast is clear. If it isn't, it will be your own fault if you founder; and if the woman tricks you, you can throw her over, and not care a damn."

"What a glorious career you are going to have, Guy! One more difficulty, and then the world lies all before you without a check to your happiness."

"You may sneer, but reason is on my side.

But about this last question of trying and failing, I admit it's the devil to do that." "But you see," he added, with a comical expression, "I never try. With a prophetic eye I foresee the result. I am afraid, Allan, that men like you will sometimes have a hard time of it. Having something in you, you will always be aspiring—trying to do great things; but, by George, you ought not to complain, for you have a delight in your work which we poor empty-headed fellows know nothing about."

Allan looked ruefully at a drawing, in which he had totally failed to express anything he wanted, and did not find much delight in his work. He began afresh, became quite absorbed, and forgot Clifford's existence. The latter, feeling active-minded, got up after a while, took a sheet, which hung in the studio for drapery purposes, arranged it in ecclesiastical folds about him, pulled up the collar of his coat, folded his hands reverentially on his breast, and drew a long face. He stood patiently in this attitude till Allan paused at his work and raised his eyes.

Allan looked at him for a moment, trying to suppress a smile, then made a rush in

his direction, and a most exciting chase began round the *lofty* studio, as Guy sneeringly called it.

Clifford, entangled in his clerical robes, had the worst of it, was tripped up and at Allan's mercy; the latter began to chastise him with the head of a sweeping brush.

"Oh, oh," groaned Guy, "I thought you might like to make a sketch of me, so as to keep your future profession always before you; it might be salutary." Then, with a sudden spring, he wrenched himself free from Moore's grasp and lighted on his feet.

"I've a good mind to tumble you out of the window," said Allan, with an expression which he meant to be ferocious.

"You couldn't, my dear boy. Now that I am free from my sacerdotal garb, I'm more than your match. Such adornments are an incumbrance. I fear you'll find them so."

This was accompanied by a scarcely perceptible wink.

"Come now, Clifford," Allan said seriously, "I am going to be a parson sooner or later, and I will not have the profession laughed at. There have been as good men in the Church



as anywhere else ; and I'm not ashamed to say that I think it ought to be the finest of all professions. If a man gives himself, body and soul, to do all he can for his fellowmen, to try and make them understand that they have minds and souls and are not mere beasts, it's not a despicable office."

Clifford had got behind an easel with an aspect of extreme fear, and peered out from time to time. At last he said in a low voice—

"Lord bless the lad, he's very violent."

Allan's indignation broke down, and he laughed, but presently he grew grave again.

"You always make everything so absurd, Clifford, that I wonder I ever talk to you about anything that interests me."

"You need not take such a high tone," he answered airily. "I have my own ideas of a clergyman also ; such a man as might have lived eight or nine hundred years ago, but does not live now, or, if he did, would turn every one's empty, formal, cruel notions of religion topsy-turvy, and bring the whole of England about his ears. I'd be suited for it myself," he added, changing his serious tone to his usual one of jest, "were it not

for some little peculiarities in my temperament, which unfit me for the life of an ascetic."

Allan's gravity was gone ; it never could last long with Guy.

"*You* will never make my ideal parson either," continued Clifford ; "and as to the ordinary type, I loathe them. When I catch a glimpse of one, I feel as if I were going down Channel in a heavy sea. Oh, I forgot ! I beg your pardon ; your father is a parson. Well, he is very nice old gentleman. I never see him."

"Don't talk such a lot of nonsense, Clifford. Let us light a pipe, and discuss future prospects. I want to know what you are going to do. You have no one but yourself to consult. What life will you choose ; what do you mean to do with yourself ?"

The two men seated themselves on wooden boxes near the window. Clifford with his head against the wall, his chin raised, his hands in his pockets, with an air of having extracted as much comfort as possible out of existing circumstances ; Moore, with his hands clasping his knees, his head bent forward with the

eager, feverish look in his eyes, which was habitual to them.

"What do I mean to do with myself?" Guy repeated. "That is quite decided, dear boy. The fortunate demise of an uncle puts me in possession of some money. You need not look incredulous. I have not got the air of a moneyed man, but appearances are deceptive."

"You are not going to idle, because you've got a few shillings?" Allan asked eagerly.

"Ah, how one's soul is hidden, even from one's bosom friend! The devil, dear fellow, will never let me be idle."

"You are going into the Engineers, I suppose?"

"I'm going to do nothing of the sort. None of your accredited, certificated professions for me! I could live on the interest of my money with economy, supplementing my income by sending round the hat after a little street preaching, conjuring, or any light entertainment of that kind, for which I have a turn."

Guy went on in his usual half-serious, half-laughing tone, with an absurd sort of languor in his voice, as if the subject did not interest

him, but he thought it just as well to mention it.

"But," he continued, "I've always had a notion that living on interest is mean, unworthy of a man of enterprise like me. I shall invest my money in a nice little cutter, which I shall run between this and the French coast. A steadily rising trade between the two countries will soon pay me. Now, Allan, will you go shares? I'll command her, and you can be my chief officer."

The last few words were spoken quicker. He took his pipe out of his mouth and turned towards Moore.

"Go shares—without a brass farthing to my name! There's something wrong in your head."

"I don't want your money, you idiot; I only want you to agree that the little skiff becomes our joint property, and that we stick to her and to each other through foul and fair weather."

Allan looked at him in silence for a minute, then he burst out enthusiastically—

"You are the most generous-hearted fellow alive, Clifford; but it would not do."

He shook his head emphatically.

"Too damned proud, I suppose? That's what you call friendship—I don't. Men will take any amount of service from their friends, but not money. Upon my soul, I think it's just as mean to refuse to take as to refuse to give; it shows that both parties set such store on the coin that it must not be passed round."

"Not a bit of it; but I could never make a sailor. I'm less fitted for a sailor than a parson. I have not got the physique for it. A long thin fellow, I'd be blown overboard in a squall! Now, honestly, Guy, do you think it would suit me?"

Clifford smiled.

"Perhaps not. It is probable that in a heavy gale, if you got your sea legs and were not horribly ill, you'd be thinking what a splendid sea-piece you would paint. You would study the curl of the breakers, or watch the clouds, instead of pulling a rope!"

"Yes, it's very probable; everything makes a picture in my mind. Things which happened when I was a boy, and made any impression on me, are now remembered by me with every detail of the scenes in which they occurred.

I see how the boughs of the trees near where I stood were bent by the wind ; how the dust was blown in eddies ; how the sky looked kind or cruel ; and then people's faces, they seem in my memory to express the full force of the thought that was in them, and not simply to be the everyday faces of the people I knew. Then sometimes there is not repose enough in my thoughts for a picture, and the beings I dream of, speak, and all their words seem to ring in passionate, musical measure. Don't laugh, for the life of you, Guy ; it is all quite true."

"Yes, quite true ; and you are going to cramp all your powers by being a twaddling parson ! Perhaps you'll make little pictures of heaven and hell, and hold them up in the pulpit ; or go into a poetic rhapsody about sending missionaries to the Feejee Islands. Why, you'll be always slipping from your moorings, and driving the orthodox to distraction by getting out to sea."

"Well, that would not matter if I were in earnest. Look at Savonarola."

"A fanatical monk ! " Guy muttered.

"Look how bravely he fought his life out," Allan went on more eagerly ; "doing his duty

splendidly, fearlessly, and dying for what he believed to be truth. The man's life was a poem."

"He was not a bad fellow," Guy said patronizingly. "But there is not a great field for that sort of labour here. What revolution are you going to work at Cairn Cove? Persuade the old women to leave off backbiting and not sell bad fish? Induce the young women to keep their lovers at a distance and preserve their virtue? The old women have known you as a child, and would not be deprived of their pleasure by a brat like you. You would get more earnest with the young women; and some day one of them would shiver all your precepts to atoms, when you found a desire springing up in your clerical breast that she should not keep you at a distance, or preserve her virtue!"

"Are you not imaginative enough to try and see things a little as I do, Clifford? I believe thoroughly in duty, and think there is more beauty in holding fast to some principle than in taking all the pleasure I can find."

"I'm brimful of imagination of a certain sort. I imagine you have the makings of a splendid life in you, and I don't want you to spoil it. Fellows like you, with such an enthu-

siastic nature, must not be allowed to throw themselves neck and crop into a certain course and shackle themselves at the start ; they must be made to take a deal of notice first."

He was silent for a few minutes.

"I tell you what it is," he said, suddenly springing to his feet. "I'll give up worrying you, and you may be a parson if you like ; but you must promise me that you'll wait a bit, that you'll take the coin as soon as I can make it, and that you'll go to Italy for three or six months, and decide for or against the long robe on your return."

Allan flushed, but did not answer. He wanted to go to Italy above all things, but had never spoken of his great desire.

"Come, is it a bargain?" Guy asked impatiently.

Allan stood up and put his hand on Clifford's shoulder. "You really mean it?" he asked, bending his head towards him.

"By George, I do."

Allan wrung his friend's hand, and turned away to his easel, looking lovingly at his drawing.

"I don't say I'll accept," he said. "My



father does not want me to prepare for my divinity examination till the autumn ; I'll think of it till then. Perhaps I shall feel surer of myself by that time. If I really make up my mind to go into the Church, then there is no use wasting your money ; but if, when autumn comes, I feel a dislike to the profession, I'll tell my father that I must go abroad for three months, and decide on my return."

"No giving in if the governor makes a row ? A promise is a promise, Allan."

"I'll not break it. There will be a row, of course ; but I've given my word."

"That's a sensible fellow ; but, as you won't accept without conditions, I hold myself free to chaff you as much as I like on the subject of the Church. Now I'm off to the Sea Gull, to talk over business matters and pick my crew. Will you come ?"

"I think I had better not. I don't hit it off with the fishermen, and feel awkward and in the way."

"You had better come. It's a great thing for a man to be at ease in any society, and to put others at ease, too."

"I'll never do that, I fear, Clifford ; however,

I'll come for a while. I can go away if I find myself getting fidgety."

The two men sprang down the ladder, which was the only means of communication between Allan's studio and the outer world; then, by a pulley arrangement, due to the ingenuity of Clifford, the ladder was hauled up and the trap-door shut.

## CHAPTER V.

## A PERILOUS LEAGUE.

It was about half a mile to the village, through a deep glen, which opened to the sea. The coast of Cornwall abounds with such spots, little glades, where you nestle amid green beauty and look out on the sea's immensity. As when held in a fond caress, the mind escapes even from love into infinity.

It was a spring evening, and the light was just beginning to go. As they walked together the thoughts of the two men had wandered off into widely different fields. Clifford was speculating on the effect which would be produced on Allan by the conversation which he would probably hear that evening. Moore was noticing everything as he walked—the drift of the clouds, the shadow

of the trees upon the grass ; he was breathing the beauty of the quiet evening ; thinking, too, of Italy in the wild enthusiastic way that youth thinks of that fair land which nature and art has so enriched. They were silent for some time.

“ I wish,” Clifford burst out suddenly, “ that society was not in the very well regulated state that it is ; there would be a chance for a fellow like me. I ought to be a buccaneer or a brigand of some sort. I have not the slightest respect for law or order. I assure you, it’s true,” he added, seeing an incredulous smile on Moore’s face. “ There are so many unjust and idiotic laws, about social life, about trade, about—about—oh, about everything. Why should I respect them ? I think all scamps are benefactors of the human race. They have so much vitality in them that they won’t put up with things as they find them, so they run headlong against established codes, and generally go to the devil themselves ; but they force people to notice the abuses and make an effort to do away with them for their own peace.”

“ The laws of a country, though not perfect,

are, I suppose, the result of the thought of the best men for centuries, and ought to be respected by us."

"Rubbish ! Some of them are, and some of them aren't. Those that I think the result of mean or stupid fools' desires I'll not uphold, I'll fly in the face of ; think myself a fine fellow if I break them without being caught, and gain all I can by breaking them. That's what I think of it," he added, throwing his pipe into the air and catching it as it fell.

"We want to lead very different lives, we two," said Allan. "It may sound very conceited, Cliff, but I'd like to be a leader of men in some sort." He flushed as he spoke. "Not, mind you, from chance or riches, or anything of that sort ; but I want so to progress mentally, that my influence must be of the best, and be felt in art, in politics, in religion, in some one of the interests that have a vital hold on social life. It sounds the dream of a conceited fool, does it not, Guy ?" he added, looking at him timidly.

"Confoundedly foolish and conceited, if you don't make it more than a dream," Clifford answered carelessly, pushing his cap off his

forehead, and continuing his amusement of spinning his pipe in the air.

"I wonder, Clifford," Allan continued, "how far on our different paths we'll be two years' hence, and what we'll think of each other."

"Shall I tell you?" Clifford answered quickly. "You'll have stuck to what you are pleased to consider your duty, all the time striving for some exalted life which won't go with it at all, and every year you'll have got more disenchanted and wearied, or else you'll have gone to the front in something or other and worked out your dream; while I will have taken a good deal of enjoyment in life, knocked about, having hairbreadth escapes from the gallows, will be very much the same at the end of ten years that I am now, a good-for-nothing devil, will probably have less money, less good looks, less friends, but, please the fates, not less pluck. At that date, I being nobody, you'll have forgotten my existence; and you being somebody, I'll remember yours. There, my friend, is a short sketch of our future."

"Not a true prediction as to my forgetfulness of you, Guy."

"Are we going to be romantically attached like school-girls, think you? By-and-by you won't approve of me at all. I'll have no law but my own law of honour, and that will lead me the Lord knows where. You'll shake your head and be sorry I've gone to the dogs. No, no; eternal friendship won't do. We'll stick to each other as long as it suits us, and drop each other when it is expedient so to do."

He began to whistle as he waited for Moore's answer, but there was an anxious, excited look in his blue eyes. Allan laughed.

"It will suit me to stick to you always."

"We'll be weeping in each other's arms presently from excess of emotion, if we go on like this! And yet we have not been drinking," Guy said, with a short laugh. "There is the Sea Gull," he added, "and she is flapping her wings to-night."

The sign of the little inn—a sea gull over a stormy sea, which was painted quite clearly as to intentions, despite of its artistic deficiencies—was beginning to creak in the breeze, which had sprung up suddenly.

The beach was pretty thickly studded with sprawling, toddling, racing children. Here and

there exasperated mothers were dragging them homewards, with no very tender touch. Little skiffs were standing away from the coast with all their canvas set, and some boats were being hauled up high and dry, stout lassies lending very efficient help.

The door of the Sea Gull stood open, and as the two friends entered they could hear the sound of several voices. They crossed the low passage and went into the inn parlour—a long, low room with large open chimney, in the recesses of which several people could conveniently sit, and with a bare sanded floor, on which stood a few forms and high-backed wooden chairs. About a dozen men were standing, lounging, or sitting in the room; two were resting their arms on the deep window-ledge and looking out seawards; one leant against the wall with a pipe in his mouth—a bull-throated fellow, a model of strength, with sinews now relaxed in careless looseness of attitude, but which could be in an instant knit up into the resistance of iron, and whose arm could be shot out from the shoulder with a crushing force, which gave him, amongst his comrades, the name of “Smashing Jack.”



None of the men were over forty, most of them much younger. They all wore fishermen's jerseys, and had faces bronzed by exposure to wind and sun.

All faces were turned eagerly towards the door when Guy entered, but some wore an unpleasant expression as they saw that he was followed by Allan Moore. The latter noticed this at once ; his perceptions were very keen, the more so on account of his delicate sensitiveness, which would have been morbid in a nature more self-engrossed. The picturesqueness of the scene struck Allan, and he thought no more of the effect of his own presence.

Clifford looked round, giving a quick succession of nods, and tossed his cap on the table.

"Good evening, my men," he said. "Glasses and liquor, and then we go to business."

He gave a long whistle, and looked in the direction of a door, at the opposite end of the room from that at which they had entered. In less than a minute, a comely girl, with well-rounded figure, clear skin, and eyes by no means timid in their glances, came in and walked up to Clifford.

"Jessie," he said, with a laughing glance of admiration, "we want something to cheer us as well as your bright eyes, so let us have brandy, cider, and ale as sharp as you can, child. Stay," he added, catching her hand just as she turned away; then drawing her head down towards him, he whispered some words in her ear.

Perhaps Guy's lips were unnecessarily close to her face as he spoke. She reddened and laughed, and looked with a quick glance in the direction of Smashing Jack, whose brows just now were lowered, and did not show much of his deep set eyes.

When Clifford's orders had been attended to, and the door closed, he turned to the men again. In the interval they had been all talking in a low voice.

"Help yourselves, and listen to me. I've seen the craft that will suit us. Half the sum down, the rest in half-yearly payments. I pay the half now, and the first half-year's payment; the rest must be paid out of our profits."

"Is this gentleman one of us?" asked Smashing Jack, with a sullen glance towards Allan.

"No ; but he is my friend, and I answer for him. He can stay if he wishes," said Clifford, carelessly, but with decision.

"I think I'll go," said Allan promptly, "unless you want me. Mr. Clifford thinks he'll make a sailor of me," he added, turning towards the men, "but he'll never do it ; and I don't see much use in being here, specially if any of you object to me."

Most of the men protested. "You can stay and welcome, master," was said by several.

Clifford kept his eyes fixed on Smashing Jack, who seemed to return the glance against his will. He shifted from one leg to another and looked down. Still Clifford watched him. At last, as if compelled to it, the man muttered—

"No offence meant, I'm sure, master, if it's any sport to you to stop."

Clifford gave a sort of grunt of triumph and of satisfaction, then turned to Moore with a laugh.

"Perhaps you would be better in the bar with Jessie, so make yourself scarce if you like. But wait there for me ; we'll walk home together."

When the door closed behind Allan, Clifford spoke again.

“Mind, I want everything to be very plain before we go into this venture. The skiff once bought, it will be ours equally—yours as much as mine. Do you understand?”

There was a murmur of astonishment, and the men looked at each other.

“Yes,” he continued, “but listen to me; I am not done yet.”

He lit his pipe, and leaned his elbow on the table.

“You’ll have to sign, every one of you, a contract to stick to her and me for five years, unless she goes to the bottom. After paying debts, the profits shall be divided equally; we share and share alike, just as much as if I had not invested sixpence in her. At the end of the five years, if most votes are for it, we sell her, and divide the money; but I command her. I don’t know as much about the sea as some of you here, but that makes no odds, I must be obeyed. If I give orders to steer for the Black Knight or the Irish Lady, it’s to be done without a growl. I appoint Smashing Jack next under

me, and he takes my orders like the rest of you. Do you all understand; and do you all agree?"

There was quiet strength in Guy's voice and glance. His eyes, usually so laughing and *debonnaire*, flashed with a keen look as if searching the men's hidden thoughts; specially they rested on Smashing Jack.

"I'm ready," said one of them suddenly, a young man with sharp face and haggard expression. "And so am I, mate," said the man next him. "And I," "and I," came from them all—all except Smashing Jack, who lounged up from the far end of the room and stood close to Clifford.

"And how about the free trade, skipper?" he asked, bringing his fist down with a thud on the table. "Have you got the pluck to stick to the good old rule, that what a man works for is his own, and to see the Government damned before you give them a share; or are you going to show the white feather, give in to the new fashion, and pay any price for peace and saving your skin—eh?"

Clifford laughed.

"Easy, Jack, easy," he said. "I am going

to steer between the two rocks. I'll carry on a tidy trade in the regular way, and also do a little in an independent style; but I'm not going to hoist 'smuggler' at my mast-head and get myself laid by the heels the first voyage. Pluck is a mighty fine thing, but one wants a little caution too."

These sentiments were generally applauded. Even the Hercules of the party seemed mollified. He sat down next Clifford, and chinked his glass with his in a friendly way, carrying on a low conversation with him.

"One thing more," Clifford said, in a few minutes, raising his voice and addressing them all. "We want some one on shore to look after our interests and store our goods, and I've found the man. What do you think of Jos Thornton?"

He looked round with a smile, as this announcement was greeted with a murmur of satisfaction.

"But," he continued, "I don't want to get him into any trouble. He is a fine old fellow, and I expect you all to keep a sharp look-out and not let any suspicion fall on him."

They all assented by word or gesture, and

Clifford resumed his conversation with Smashing Jack. The other men began to talk, too, and there was a continual flow of voices. The elder men related some of their sea experiences, and the hours went by. They drank pretty deep, all of them, and were mostly intoxicated when they rose to go. With Clifford's warm-blooded, excitable nature, it took but little drinking to make him wild.

Allan had fallen asleep in the bar, tired out with waiting for Clifford. His head lay on his arm, which was stretched across the little table at which he sat. His face looked almost colourless in the quiet of sleep. It was a thin, well-moulded face, with more decision about the curves of the lips than is usually seen in so young a mouth, the characteristics of which his dark moustache was, as yet, too small to hide.

Guy looked at him for a moment, then turned to Jessie, who was sitting, darning a stocking,

"He is a handsome fellow, isn't he?" he asked, "How many times have you kissed him?"

She looked up and made a contemptuous

face, as if the kiss would not give her much pleasure.

"He's not your fancy, eh? You prefer Smashing Jack. Come now," he added, sitting down beside her, and putting his arm round her waist, "does not that big fellow want to marry you?"

"He may want," she answered scornfully.

"You like me better, eh, darling?" he asked, kissing her cheek carelessly; "but you know I'll never marry you. Marriage would not agree with my constitution. I could not stick to any one, and I never expect any one to stick to me. Don't you find one man as good as another, so long as he loves you? That's my idea about women."

"There's some that's gentlemen and there's some that's not," Jessie answered, with an eloquent glance.

"By the former, of course, you mean me," he said with a laugh; "and perhaps I am a gentleman, but, upon my soul, I don't know. I am as changeable as the wind. I play with a girl one day and forget her the next; only I give her warning always, then she can send me to the devil, or she can——" He terminated the



discourse by drawing her head to a level with his, and giving her a lengthy embrace.

"By the Lord, I'd forgotten Allan, and I must not shock the old fellow."

"Hullo, Moore!" he shouted, kicking him vigorously. "Wake up; it's time to toddle home."

Allan awoke with a start, looked round with a dazed expression for a minute, then recognized where he was, and also the fact that Clifford's face was unusually flushed, and his eyes unusually reckless. Allan did not often see him after a carouse. He rose at once.

"I'm ready," he said. "Let us go; it must be late." As he spoke, he took Clifford by the arm.

"Taking me from paradise," Guy muttered; "by Jove, it's too hard."

At the door he stopped, leaned back to cast a look of admiration at Jessie, who received all these demonstrations as a matter of course, and then allowed Moore to lead him away.

Clifford treated Allan as his son or very much younger brother, on their way home, and

gave him many hints for the conduct of life ;  
but he was so little able to manage the conduct  
of his own steps, that his friend did not leave  
him till he was safely at his own door.

## CHAPTER VI.

## ORESTES AND PYLADES.

THREE months went by. The *Sunlight* was carrying on her trade, legal and illicit, with considerable success. Clifford was back from his second voyage, and hardly was his barque moored when he walked through the village to Allan's haunt. On his way he picked up a dirty, howling child, and carried it for a hundred yards on his shoulder; he extracted a thorn out of a limping dog's foot; and dropped several packets of smuggled tobacco at his favourite cottages. But he did not delay long, and was at the studio in half an hour. This was always his first visit. To-day the ladder was drawn up.

"Moore is in the clouds and must not be disturbed," he muttered to himself. Then he sat down on an old oat-bin, took some bread and cheese out of his pocket, and began to eat.

with evident relish. When this occupation was ended he lay back on the oat-bin with his hands under his head, looking speculatively at the trap-door above him.

"I wonder when the fellow means to look out," he thought. Presently he began to sing, quite unconsciously, and from sheer content. He had not got half-way through the first verse of "Tom Bowling" when the trap-door opened, and Allan looked down at him.

"Hullo," Guy said coolly, "I did not mean to disturb you, but if you'll drop that tackle I'll go aloft."

He nodded to Allan when he was in the studio, he did not shake hands. Then he perched himself on an empty case, and began to fill his pipe.

"Well, old chap," he said, with a warmth of expression which was better than friendly demonstration, "how have you been? In a chronic state of dreams ever since?"

Allan pushed back his hair from his brow, and looked at his friend with a smile. The two men were a strong contrast to one another. Clifford had filled his pipe, and held it in his mouth in such a way that it gave a comic sort

of crying shape to lips which naturally curved upwards. He was a small man, well knit together, and without an ounce of cumbersome flesh, yet he was not thin, and had a general air of roundness. He had hair of a red brown, which, though rather closely cropped, tumbled about in the freedom of waves and curls, and had a happy way of its own. He had been very fair. No doubt a proud mother had likened his skin to alabaster, to snow, and to everything which was pre-eminently white; but now his face was burnt brown, except a part of his brow usually covered with his hat, and this still proved his claim to fairness.

Moore was a tall, slight man, with very dark hair and colourless complexion. There was a pathetic sweetness in the eyes and mouth.

"Not dreams," Allan answered, with a smile which was rather sad; "nightmares!"

"But you've done a lot of work?"

"Yes; I have gone on. I must; it's like breathing, as necessary and almost as unconscious."

"Bring forth every fragment that you've drawn or painted, and let me see. I have not gained any further knowledge of art in the

Atlantic, but I am quite capable of admiring you. I wonder why it is that I think you are an artist, and that by-and-by others will find it out. Perhaps it's the wildness of your pictures that takes me, or perhaps it's the legs! They are comic."

They both laughed. Then Guy began turning over all Allan's sketches and paintings.

Moore's mind was full of beauty, but his hand was untutored, and the poor expression of his thoughts drove him to despair. Yet the thoughts demanded outward form; they racked and goaded him till the hand was moved, and he dashed into some representation of their whisperings. The drawings were strange and unfinished, and mocked him with their insufficiency. Often, on despairing days, he doubted if in art he could ever work out his thoughts. He felt that, perhaps, he was allowing all his energy to be drawn into a vain striving for what he could never attain, and that he was drifting away from duty and a life of power over his fellow-men. Thus, in a growing fever and in faithful worship of a beauty which enticed and eluded him, the months passed, and the time was drawing nigh when he

would be forced to make a decision and abide by it.

With unwavering faith, Guy Clifford admired even the most mysterious of Allan's sketches ; and whenever any one spoke of Moore in his presence, he would say quietly—

“If Moore never gets twopence for his pictures, and never has one accepted at any exhibition, he is still a genius.”

Then people would smile, and say—

“You are an enthusiastic friend.”

After a silent inspection of the drawings, Clifford said, with a laugh—

“You are not improved in the matter of legs ! I've frequently offered you mine to draw from. I assure you they are well made.”

“I know it, my dear fellow ; they are admirable, but models irritate me.”

“I should like them,” Guy answered with decision. “I feel myself suddenly craving to be an artist when I see a pretty woman. I fancy myself drawing her beautiful features while she is standing opposite to me. Then one could gape and gaze at her to one's heart's content, without being insolent.”

After a little silence Guy said—

"I wish I understood about these things. I wonder could I make myself up in art and be of any use to you."

"I don't believe, if you read all the art lectures extant, and visited all the galleries in Europe, you would know a bit more about it than you do now—perhaps less. At any rate, I should lose your ignorant admiration, which I like ; and you would worry the life out of me with useless suggestions."

"Ah ! well, I shan't exert myself to grow learned, if it is to have such a fatal result. Now tell me all the news—everything that has happened since I went away."

"Not much, I fancy ; I can't remember."

"I know how to make you remember," Guy said, taking up a portfolio of sketches. "Tell me exactly how they come. This was what you were at when I left ; which comes next?"

He laid them all out on the floor in order.

"Now, then," he said, when his task was completed, "you can tell me everything that occurred as you were doing each of these designs, can't you ?"

Allan laughed.

"I believe I can."



Then he began weaving the little events of every day with his own fantasies.

"Ah, that one," he said, when Clifford had got to the last drawing in the portfolio, "was in my head for a long time; and as I was walking on the cliffs one stormy day I met Nora Severne, and she got mixed up in my thoughts and came out in the picture."

"Ah! Nora Severne!" said Guy. "That's the girl who runs wild, and is supposed to be an awful little scamp. I think I've seen her once."

"Human beings," Allan continued, "are in my mind closely joined to all nature, allied to the winds and waves, the trees, the rocks, the animals, as much as to the father and mother who bore them. Nora is the embodiment of a storm; I hear the gust when I am with her. It's not a cold, cruel storm, but southern and passionate, and sometimes fatal. That day, I remember so well, she seemed to my mind caught into the wind, with her floating garments and wild hair; and there she is"—he pointed to the sketch—"wrecking the ill-manned ship, but carrying a kind of glory of just wrath, a golden glow of passionate beauty about her."

Clifford was silent for a minute.

"Do you know Miss Severne?" he asked presently.

"Miss Severne!" Allan repeated with a laugh. "That conventional title does not seem suited to her. I'm not sure, I've spoken to her once or twice. Somehow one never thinks of talking to her as one would to other girls. She is not my type of womanhood. She has a very changing face; she is interesting, but I imagine one could not rely on her."

Allan began to work again and was silent.

"I want to do so many things," he said, after a few minutes, looking up with flushed face and eager eyes. "There seems no branch of art or literature into which I have not a desire to penetrate, so as to understand, at least a little—to perceive ever so dimly—the heights above me to which the intellect of man can soar. I don't mean that it would be possible for me ever to reach them, but I like to see them."

Guy was lying back on two wooden boxes, which he had arranged so as to procure the greatest possible comfort therefrom; he was smoking placidly, with a slight smile on his face.

"Do you? How odd! Now I want to enjoy life, and, as a matter of fact, I do enjoy it; but if I had a mind like yours, I suppose I should be ambitious. But it strikes me as rather depressing to see heights and never reach them. Dear me, I'm quite exhausted! Why do you lead me to talk so much? Just mix me some brandy and water, if you don't mind."

Allan did so, then went back to his work. He was modelling a head in clay. His enthusiastic face was all aflame with excitement, the blue veins showing clearly on his temples; there was eagerness in his whole form—in the way he stood at his work, in the poise of his head, the movements of his hands—but perhaps not enough staying power to lead to good results. One might guess at this in looking at him, but not safely assert it.

Having taken a long draught of brandy and water and resumed his pipe, Guy said lazily—

"Tell me all the things you want to do, Allan. I'll give you some excellent advice. You must know I am not such a fool as I look."

"I have unsubduably artistic desires in me, Clifford. When I am working as I am to-day, I feel there would be nothing more glorious

than to be a sculptor. Fancy working out your thought in actual form. Even already I feel a creator ; and have such a splendid sense of power, as I make the clay obedient to me and bring the expression of soul into this poor earth."

"Go on, old fellow; that's only one thing you want to do."

"There are other days when I only want to paint. My mind is filled with beautiful colour, and sculpture seems cold in its expression ; days when the whole world is aglow with smiles and caresses, with love and the beauty of women, and then I want colour."

"And after that, what's the next change?"

"There are days when I want to be a great musician, when music seems a higher and purer art than any other. Finally, there are my maddest days, when I want to write poetry for long hours, when my mind seems one with nature, when all her aspects, all her beauties are symbols of the soul's life, are so interwoven with thought, that my mind floats in a divine ether and pants for words to tell of its imaginings."

"So that you want to be poet, painter,

sculptor, musician, and all of the best. You are tolerably ambitious. You want to be a world's wonder, Allan. Was there ever any man that did all that? Of course you know, but I'm blessed if I do."

"I don't think there was ever any one who excelled in all; and yet I can't see why such a being is not possible. All art is so closely knit, and when there is a response in our nature to each form of expression, why, if each part of our mind were duly developed, should we not be capable of gigantic work."

"My dear fellow, I take it, there is a certain amount of brains to be grabbed up in the world—terribly out of proportion to the heads to be filled—and if the brains were all stuffed into a few men, the beautiful things those few would do, would be in no wise appreciated by the mass of idiots from whom was withdrawn every gleam of intelligence. I think that's rather neatly put."

Guy lifted his head, took his pipe out of his mouth, and looked at Allan.

"He's not thinking of a single word I'm saying," he muttered. "I must touch on some subject which will wake him up."

"I say!" he said aloud. "Allan, amongst your various fascinating labours, you've not mentioned this time the profession of your choice, pastor to God's flock!"

There was not a smile on Guy's face which Allan could detect, as he looked round quickly.

"It's not my choice," he said sharply.

"Indeed? You are improving."

"But," Allan continued hotly, "I will maintain that it's not a labour to be sneered at. I think one might make quite a fine sort of life out of it, by trying to get men to live above their poor, faulty bodies, with their coarse, selfish desires, and to have some sort of aspiration in them."

"Poor, faulty bodies!" Guy repeated musingly, leaning on one elbow and looking at his shapely limbs. "I am uncommonly well made; so are you, Allan—perhaps a trifle frail, but comely; and the world is full of beautiful bodies. I've not the slightest sympathy with your mortifications of the flesh and all that sort of thing. Why are pomegranates nicer than aloes; sunshine and a fair wind than foul weather? That we should prefer them, of course. And as to selfish, coarse desires, we

have not all got them, thank you ; and if a man has, you won't keep them out with a sermon, I can tell you. There, Allan, I am quite worn out with that speech. Mix me another glass, friend. You've no notion of my enfeebled condition to-day."

Guy lay back full stretch, and closed his eyes with a comical expression of exhaustion.

A little smile flitted across Allan's face, and then he went on earnestly—

"Come, Guy, I should like you to understand me." He stopped working and came nearer to Clifford. "What does religion mean?" he continued eagerly. "It means, does it not, the highest, the best, the noblest that's in us ; something that holds us back from evil. Well, I don't see why the profession of this should be pompous and ugly and a blotch in the sight of men."

Clifford yawned lazily, before he answered. "But the Church is the profession of other men's notions of what is right—a rubbishy lot of laws, which you will be bound to stick to yourself, and will have to thrust on others. I think I'll give up talking to you about being a parson. The time will soon come round

when you'll have to make up your mind, and you'll remember your promise. I have behaved like a father to you," he went on solemnly; "have exhausted all my reason and logic, and am sick of the subject. By the way," he added quickly, "if you want to argue out these sort of things, why don't you talk with old Jos Thornton?"

Allan laughed.

"I believe Jos is answerable for your morals and your conscience. I was thinking of asking him to help me to work up for my examination; do you think he would do it?"

"Like a shot; he's a capital fellow, and his general surliness is only skin deep."

As Clifford spoke, he got up and lounged over to Allan's work. He stood opposite to it for a minute.

"By George!" he said suddenly, "it's the image of Evelyn Holt, the new doctor's daughter. I saw her as I came through the village to-day."

"Is it? That's unsatisfactory, for it is intended to be like that cast you see there."

"It will never do, my dear lad, to have your head full of a young woman, when you are a



parson ; you'll be describing her in a sermon, and saying she is blessed above women. No," he added, shaking his head very gravely ; " this is not mortifying the flesh."

" A parson may fall in love, and a parson may marry. Matrimony is a holy estate," Allan answered, laughingly.

" Is it ? Perhaps so, on account of its trials. A parson's wife," Guy went on, " ought to be exceedingly plain, exceedingly homely, so that she may not be a rock of offence or an occasion of stumbling to other men ; also that the mind of her husband may not be distracted by jealousy or agitated by passion. She ought," he continued gravely, " to be entirely absorbed by her children, her house, and her parish. She ought to submit to the embraces of her husband with meekness and decorum, and she ought——"

At this moment a roll of paper came down heavily on Guy's head.

" Do stop, Clifford ; you are an incorrigible ruffian. If ever I marry, I'll marry a beautiful woman ; and if she has such well regulated feelings, I'll have nothing to say to her. But it will be no trial to my virtue to be only the

husband of one wife ; it will never be in my line to be in love with half a dozen women at the same time, like you, Guy."

"I have not an inconstant mind ; you misunderstand my character," he answered, with comical solemnity. "If I could once set that question of beauty at rest, my heart would be as fixed as—the Eddystone. You see, I sit and talk to a girl occasionally. I take her hand and look in her eyes ; I find that she is not beautiful, but still there is some beauty in her—in the glance she gives me beneath her half-closed eyelids, in the bloom on her cheek, in the shape of her neck ; she loves me, perhaps, and that is another beauty in her nature to which I must pay homage. I'm all soul, Allan, that's the fact ; and whenever I find any spirit that answers to mine, I must love it ; but when I meet a woman who is quite equal to my conception of beauty, then Guy Clifford will be unswervingly loyal ! Meantime I accept the fragments !"

"I wish I were like you, Clifford," Allan said impatiently, "but I am such a restless, dissatisfied devil ; I get no joy in life. I feel a feverish desire to work, and perhaps one day

I work honestly, and for five minutes I have a sense of strength and calm ; then it's all gone after a bit, and I am remorseful that I have not done better, and so it goes on. One day I am in such feverish haste that I rush from one thing to another, so as to save time, and consequently I do nothing ; another day I am so dreamy that I am seeing visions, and my hands are idle ; so I shall never do much. I shan't even have had the fun of life, for though I can see the humour in everything, it does not seem for me—I can't share it somehow."

"I am not much use to you, old fellow," Guy said, dropping his jesting tone.

"This is the reason," Moore continued, "that when I am so uncertain about myself, I am glad to do the only thing that seems clearly right to me, that is, to please the old man by going into the Church. After all," he added, "most of us have to seize a rope if it's thrown to us when we are out of our depth—there's a nautical symbol for you."

"A very broken one. We had better learn to swim before we get out of our depth."

"There is a joy in the fulfilment of duty," Allan said musingly.

He had left off work ; he was smoking a cigar, and his eyes were fixed on the ground.

“I think it's damned unhealthy always to think of what you think. By George, there's plenty to do, and plenty to enjoy !”

“But, Clifford, there must be some sort of purpose in life ; you must work towards some end.”

“Yes ; I work towards the French coast when I leave England, and towards Cairn Cove on the trip home. I try to pay my way by reasonable freightage, and to balance my accounts by a little speculation.” (There was a humorous expression in his eyes.) “In moments of leisure like this, I indulge perhaps in visions about you, or I reflect on the charms of some French or Cornish damsel. In memory, I live over again some happy hour” (here he half closed his eyes and gave an expression of ecstasy to his mobile face), “but I never, by any chance sigh or regret, fall into melancholies. The world is all before me, and love and women have not vanished out of the land.”

Allan let all his jesting pass without a laugh or comment ; he was absorbed by his own thoughts.

"And you go on like that, Guy, and are one of the truest, most upright fellows living. I wonder, is it best, after all, to take life in that sort of way, and not to strive and fight for some imagined excellence!"

"I'm not upright, Allan, not a bit of it; you try to make me so in this den of yours. I wish to heaven you would get some sort of chair that a fellow could sit on. I'm black and blue all over, from these damned boxes."

Guy got up and began poking about the room. At last, in an obscure corner, he rummaged out an old hamper full of straw; this he placed close to the wall, and sat down in it with a sigh of content.

"Ah! that's better," he said. "Now to return. I'm not upright—what you call, what they call, what the world calls. I don't care a tinker's curse for the laws of man, or for what men are pleased to call the laws of God. There! some fine day you'll find that out; and will have to prove your loyalty to your friend at the cost of your own reputation, or else pass by on the other side!"

"You are always making yourself out a reckless good-for-nothing."

"So I am. Good Lord, what's the use of being young, if one's not reckless?"

"Be serious, if you can, Guy. Are you content to shuffle along without any rule of action, any standard of right and wrong? If so, how is it .you are such a good fellow, are such a firm friend, are so generous and brave——"

"Go on, go on; you have not half got through my good qualities yet. Tender to a fault where a woman is concerned; forgiving, because too indolent to resent an injury; generous, owing to the impossibility of being a screw!"

"Can you never say what you mean?" Moore said angrily.

Clifford sprang to his feet suddenly, kicked over a box near him, and laid his hand on Allan's shoulder.

"Yes, for once," he said. "As for me, I'm not good for anything, never shall be; but you, you have the stuff in you; only give up this clutching at half a hundred things and stand on your feet like a man. If you think it right to be a parson, study, put your back into it, give it a fair chance, get out of the atmosphere

of old women and senseless reasoning into the world, and then decide. If you can't take to it, choose for yourself; and I bet ten to one you'll justify your choice by your work. There—I've been serious long enough. I shall go and make love to Jessie Lawless, to indemnify myself for this gravity. She is just the sort of girl for a lazy man. Did you ever try?"

His face assumed its usual careless expression.

"How can you fool away your time with a woman like Jessie Lawless, a woman who——"

"Spare my feelings, Moore. Tell me not of her infidelities. Heaven has given her a heart so vast that it is open to the whole human race; or, if this be thought an exaggeration, at least to the whole parish!"

Allan laughed, but said impatiently—

"Upon my soul, I don't understand you. I should think myself degraded by having anything to say to such a woman. You are not a coarse-minded fellow by any means, and yet——"

"I've no pride. I am quite above pride, and, like all great men, am many-sided."

"Some day, when you do really love some

woman, you'll wish to God you could blot all this foolery out of your mind."

"Impossible to say what I may feel. I've been told, that when a man is in the condition you allude to, he is liable to terrible fits of self-abasement; so I shall always keep that in mind, and no doubt the remembrance will support me. I'm not such a ruffian as you imagine, for, though love sets the sails to every breeze, honour always holds the helm. Is not that poetical?"

Clifford ran his hand through his hair, so that it stood up in a forest of curls; put his cap on very much at the back of his head; and, with a sudden spring, disappeared down the ladder.

Allan stepped back to his work, but stood looking at it. He was not thinking much of his work, he was thinking of life; of how he would deal with it and its mysteries. Allan's was a religious nature, as all fervent natures must be; religious in its impatience with the world, as it looks to vulgar vision; religious in its capacity for worship, and possessing, with its reverence for the Divine beyond itself, a desire for the development of the



Divine within itself. And all Allan's qualities were rooted in that human error and glory—the desire to reign. “Come out from among them, and be ye separate,” is the constant appeal men make to their souls; and in diverse ways the struggle for power is made, and through long ages it has been made in none more triumphantly and tyrannically than in the priest's profession, for in no vocation is self-deception more facile. It is so easy for a priest to gild his acts with spiritual motives; so easy, even for a man of intelligence, to justify the blind acceptance of arbitrary laws by the desire to make use of any refining influence which may work on men's minds, and help them to live above material wants. So few are honest to themselves; honesty to others is much less rare. Moore was already a priest, in the sense that every earnest, worshipping nature is a priest, makes a religion of his life, and invests every thought and act with the sacredness of a continuous effort towards perfection. Allan's nature was tender, but not unselfish, he desired that even his love for others should minister to his own mental development. He knew

little of himself, because he knew little of his fellow-men. He had a strong sense of being able to do, to make, to create—a sense that his hands, unskilled as they were, could be the best of servants; and this feeling of being capable of everything made him waver in his choice of a pursuit. Peculiarly fascinating, peculiarly lovable are such men often; they tremble on the verge of fineness, of the heroic, and are for that reason more capable of being appreciated by the ordinary mind than greater men, who, by their very strength and down-rightness, oftentimes shatter the dreams in which their fellows see them.

Occasional words, such as those of Clifford's to-day, would rouse Allan to actual life from his dreams of pictures, poems, statues, and would disquiet him, make him feverish and impatient. A new element was growing up amongst the influences in Allan's life, and the likeness to Evelyn Holt, which Guy had recognized in the head Moore had been modelling, pointed out to him that there was now another subject on which he must begin to think less vaguely. He had never hidden from Clifford anything that was in his mind; but this—his

admiration for Evelyn Holt—he had not spoken of. He scarcely knew the reason of this silence. He was not in love with her, but she began to fill his thoughts a good deal. He liked to see her often, to think of her face afterwards, and to make stories about her with his brush or his pen. Clifford could not understand the sort of dream in which he thought of her. Clifford would think it a love affair—something to play with, jest about and forget, like his own romances—and it was not so.

Allan was like a woman in his power of self torture. His was a nervous organization, and the slightest word which disturbed the dream in which he lived was like the repeated striking of a note or dropping of water, falling on the excited ear of one who is ill. He could not go on with his work. He might make his thoughts about Evelyn clearer, if he went to see her now. So, after a few minutes' hesitation, his work was put aside, and the studio closed for that day.

## CHAPTER VII.

## A WOMAN-HATER.

AWAY from the village, at the end of the bay, stood what was called the Wreck Cottage. The cliffs began to rise just behind it, curved round, and swept out into the sea. The cottage faced towards the sou'-east, and when the sun shone it caught every gleam, and seemed the brightest spot on the coast; but on stormy nights the winds howled round the rocks, and made it desolate. At such times it was a place wherein to dream of shipwrecks and drowning men, to hear despairing cries on the driving wind, to strain your eyes looking through the darkness for a sail, and to fancy that the curl of the breakers was the upward toss of a sinking arm in its last appeal for help.

There was a little garden round the house; roses and jessamine clambered over the thatched

roof, and on bright, calm days it looked the peace fullest of abodes.

There were tales in the village of the pluck of Jos Thornton, the owner of Wreck Cottage ; tales of many a man and woman snatched from death by his care, when the sea tossed them in its fury on the beach. There were tales, too, of the rocks behind his cottage being haunted by shipwrecked souls ; and it was whispered that these were the beings with whom Jos held converse, for he was not wont to gossip much with the villagers. He was a scholar, people said ; but had come down in the world—no one knew how or why.

Nora Severne heard these stories ; in truth, she was familiar with the history of most of the neighbours—as much of it, at least, as the fishwives had picked up and patched together from hearsay. No one of whom they talked in their loose gabble interested Nora so much as Jos Thornton, for beyond the surface of his life their observation seemed unable to penetrate. There was a little touch of mystery about Jos which fascinated Nora, and made her linger a little as she passed his cottage.

Some three weeks after the return of the

*Sunlight* from her second trip to France, Nora, passing Wreck Cottage as it grew dusk, slackened her pace as usual, and watched Jos Thornton as he sat by his door-sill, making nets. This—when the day's harder labour of boat-building was over—was his evening occupation. It was pleasant to watch his old fingers moving so fast, pleasant to see the well-kept garden, with the evening sun on it. It looked like home and love somehow—like some one's arms held out to her.

There was not a line of weakness in Thornton's face. Age gave to it no expression of indifference or submission. Years had puckered up the skin into firm, decided wrinkles; and the sharp, dark eyes, though they had retreated a little under the shaggy brows, looked out as fearlessly as ever on the world. He sat working, and his glance from time to time swept over the tossing sea.

"Wind gone round to the sou'-east'ard," he muttered. "It's going to blow a whole gale."

Presently, in a voice which had all the fire of youth, though not much of its music, he sang—

“ On through the ground sea, shove  
Light on the larboard bow ;  
There’s a nine knot breeze above  
And a sucking tide below.”

Nora crept up to the low railings, which separated the garden from the road, leaned on them, watched and listened. Jos looked up and saw her, but did not speak. This was the fourth or fifth time she had come.

“There’s a nine knot breeze above,” he hummed below his breath, netting away vigorously.

Why the devil did she stand there? He objected to women ; did not see the good of them. Of course they were good for having children, for keeping the world supplied with inhabitants ; but the Almighty was not remarkably clever in the means he had furnished for that end : He might have given men more harmless producers. Having cut them short of all reasonable faculties, He need not have left their tongues so loose in their heads.

He glanced up again at Nora. This lass was not much like a woman, certainly ; as straight and thin as a rush, with short hair that curled like the foam of the waves, and

eyes like the grey blue of the sky when the wind was up from the north'ard. She had not learnt mincing ways as yet, but leaned on the top bar like any lad ; but it was a woman's idle curiosity which brought her here. He must give her a lesson.

"Girl !"

Nora started. By this time she had ceased to think of Thornton.

"There she goes, jumping as if the earth had opened. Nerves and rubbish !" he muttered.

"Well," he added angrily, "aren't you a girl ; and can't you answer when you are spoken to ?"

A little smile came on her lips. It was a cold, flickering smile, and was gone in an instant. She opened the gate, and came in.

"Yes ; here I am. What have you to say to me ?"

"I did not tell you to come in ; but never mind. Why have you stood there so often ? What do you see in an old man making nets ?"

"I don't know."

"Ah, of course not ; none of you ever know why you do things. I don't like girls. Women are a mistake. When I look up from my



work I like to see the trees or the rocks, not a girl. Do you understand ? That's the worst of them, they stick themselves everywhere, so that you can't help seeing them."

"I can stand outside if I like," Nora said defiantly. "The road is not yours."

"No, more it is ; but you annoy me. If you were a boy, now, it would not matter."

"I don't think it makes any difference. Suppose you think I am."

He shook his head.

"What can you do ? What kind of a life do you lead ? Good Lord, what's the good of you ?"

Her eyes flashed ; they changed from blue grey to a kind of flame colour ; they seemed to glow in the dusk.

"I'm just as strong, just as brave as any boy," she said vehemently. "I am not afraid of the waves or the storms, of keeping my footing on the cliff's edge, of handling an oar or furling a sail."

Jos laughed.

"But you scream if you hear a noise in the dark. You would not pass Tregeagle's Pool at dead of night, nor watch the Irish Lady

walking on the water, without fainting. There's what it is to be a woman."

Her face changed again. The anger went, and it was full of eager curiosity.

"Those things are not true, are they? Did you ever hear Tregeagle?"

"Did I ever hear the wind blow? His laugh is horrible, his howl is worse. There, I told you you were only a girl. You would quake if you saw one of the Cornish giants, or any of the ghosts of the drowned creeping through the air and wringing their hands."

"Would not you?" she asked, drawing a little nearer to him.

"Not I."

"Not if they were real spirits that whispered and mocked you?"

"No."

She bent a little towards him and smiled.

"Then I'll tell you the reason. You never see them. I do. Father always said it was not every one could see them. You can't." She said it emphatically.

"And you think your father knows? That's one of the follies of women. The first man

they know is a god to them, then the next, then the next ; they've no notions that are not borrowed. Who is your father, girl ?”

“Edgar Severne. He is dead now.”

Jos gave a long whistle.

“So you are a young lady, or you think yourself one ; and I suppose you fancy I ought to be more respectful to you, and call you Miss ; but Jos Thornton never cared for dignities and a' that. He would never hurt a woman, because she is a poor, weak creature, to be treated kindly ; but he would not be a bit tenderer to a princess than to a village tramp, so——”

Nora looked at him, but did not move. Presently Jos stood up, put his finger in his mouth, then held it up in the air.

“Gone round,” he said, “of course. We'll have a rough night of it.”

The sky was full of black clouds hurrying away to the east.

Jos seemed to notice suddenly that Nora had not gone yet. He looked for a minute at the quiet figure.

“So you are not sorry that you are not a boy ?”

"No. What does it matter? I have a strong will and strong hands. I can live like one—can't I?"

"I wonder would it succeed? Your father was like a woman; perhaps you'll reverse matters. It would be a triumph to make a woman strong like a man, but it's no use trying. What do you know? How to play a tune that no one wants to hear, or do some woman's needlework, which no one wants to see. You would think more of tying a ribbon than of reading a poem, more of curling your hair than studying the lives of the great. Bah! What's the good of you? I always asked what's the good of you?"

He stamped one foot as he said the last words, and peered into her face. She drew back a little.

"Ah, always afraid—afraid of live fools and the dead past, afraid of things that are and things that are not; cringing to false substance, and shrinking from false shadow."

He stopped a moment, with a taunting light in his old eyes.

It was growing dark. There was an angry

glow in the sky, as of coming storm. Nora looked out towards the sea with a fixed, dreamy gaze. She was watching the shapes of the clouds changing ever.

“Ah,” Jos Thornton whispered, bending towards her. “You see them now, lass, don’t you? But wait awhile. Go out by yourself on the cliff yonder, stand there while the wind howls, and see them come. Do you know what they are—those clouds? They are the spirits of the lost at sea; and when a ship is driving on the rocks, as I’ve seen it many a time, they whirl and toss about, and send their voices on the blast, and hail the shipwrecked by their names, so that they know there’s no hope for them. Oh, there are armies of them, and every week there are more, till the air is full. A stormy night is their night of revels.”

His voice thrilled Nora—not with fear, but with a strange longing to see that which was unseen to others.

There was a low whistle, a sound as of a signal, and a man sprang lightly over the railings, and came up to Thornton.

“What the devil are you frightening the

child for, Jos?" he asked, in a laughing tone. "You old sinner, have you nothing better to do? Don't mind him," he added, turning to Nora; "he is talking rubbish. If he told the truth, he would say that he believes we've no souls, and that we die like any vermin; but that's not a doctrine for little girls, only for the superior sex."

"He did not frighten me," Nora said quietly.

"There, Jos, I always said you were a complete failure."

The man who spoke was rather small, but of that springy figure which suggested inexhaustible activity. He had a face full of quick interest in life, a strong chin, and pleasure-loving lips.

"What has he been saying?" he asked Nora quickly.

She did not answer at once.

"There, I know," he added; "you need not tell me. He has been talking of ghosts and gnomes and churchyards."

"Not much, master," said Jos. "I've been chiefly making the lass understand that women are no good."

"What an old brute you are!" said Guy

Clifford, with a laugh. "How badly they must have treated you, Jos! As for me, I find them delightful; so soft and kind, a little embarrassing sometimes, but very forgiving, if you know how to treat them."

Nora was standing, quietly listening to the two men. Jos looked impatient.

"Come," he said quickly, "let the lass go."

"Not at all," said Guy. "I want to talk to her."

He laid a detaining hand on her shoulder. Nora took a step away from him with a movement of haughtiness, which contrasted strangely with her childish face and manner.

"More afraid of me than Jos, after all. Well, I always find that being feared is the first step to being loved. They all shrink from me at first, and all cling to me afterwards; their tenacity is marvellous sometimes—like mussels on a ship's bottom. Will you come into Wreck Cottage?" he added, addressing Nora more directly.

"No, thank you."

"Why not? I think it very inhospitable of that old bear not to have invited you in before this; besides, I can't see you in this light,

and if I meet you again, I shall not be able to recognize you."

"That would not much matter."

The words were said firmly and simply. She moved towards the gate.

"Good night," she said, turning her head towards Jos Thornton.

"You won't come and stand at the railings any more," the old man said sharply. "Mind, I don't like girls."

"I will not promise. You need not have detained me; you need not have spoken to me. Oh," she said, just as she was going, "I did want to ask you something. What would it cost to have a boat built—a small, light boat, such as a boy could row by himself?"

"It might be a matter of a good many sovereigns; I can't tell. But you are not a boy. You don't want it for yourself; you would be afraid to go out alone."

"Afraid!" she repeated. The expression in her face required no further word.

Clifford nudged Jos.

"Come, I don't think a boat need cost so much. Suppose you think it over, and let the child know."



"Very well," growled Jos; "anything at all to get rid of her."

Clifford walked with Nora to the gate, and opened it. The wind was blowing freshly; the dense bank of clouds drifted off, and left a stretch of clear sky; there was more light now, and Clifford was very close to Nora as he opened the gate for her. He looked into her eyes as he said "Good night." He saw that she was older than he had thought, that hers was a face with a strange fearlessness in it; but perhaps he noted more than anything (as was his wont), that she was pretty.

"I've seen you before," he said quickly, standing with his hand on the latch of the gate. "I can't tell where; I think I ought to know who you are."

"I am Nora Severne, the child of Edgar Severne's last wife."

She walked quickly away. Clifford raised his hat, and stood for a minute watching her; then rejoined Jos Thornton.

"Well, Master Guy, anything with a petticoat will take you from business," growled the old man.

"Why not? Jos," he added, after a minute,

"I believe that girl must be sixteen, if not more. I don't think you have been behaving well to her. Come, what did you say?"

"Told her that all of her sex were contemptible. She had better start fair, with clear notions on that subject. Come in, it's over dark to see your face, and I know better what you mean by your face than your words."

They went into the cottage. It was a model of neatness. The decorations were various: a chart, an old sou'wester, a piece of rope's end, a ship's lamp, all hung on the wall. On the high chimney shelf were books, looking well worn from use; and where the titles were at all legible you could see the names of the great Greek and Latin authors, of Shakespeare and Chaucer, Fielding, Swift, Defoe, and others. At one end of the little room a hammock was slung from the ceiling.

Jos looked at the hammock ruefully for a minute after he entered.

"Can't get into it any more, boy. I made a shot at it a week ago, and nearly broke my neck. It's getting pretty nearly time for me to knock off work."

Both men filled their pipes from a large tin

of tobacco, which stood in the corner of the room, and sat down by the fire.

"Jos," Clifford said presently, after looking into the fire silently, "can't you make a boat for Miss Severne?"

"*Miss* Severne, oh! *Miss* Severne can't pay for it; besides, she is a girl, and what good would it be to her?"

"You don't gossip much in the village, Jos, or you would know that Nora Severne is as smart in a boat as any lad."

Jos did not answer for a minute, then he said, "I've often wondered if you could make anything of a woman, if you took her in hand in time. I don't suppose the inside of her head is so very different from a man's."

"Suppose you experimentalize on Nora Severne. Educate her, Jos, brace her up with Greek and Latin, make her forswear pretty frocks, needlework, fainting fits, crying, and all feminine accomplishments, and see how she'll turn out in life!"

Guy laughed heartily as he ended.

"Lord bless you, her people would interfere; would say I was leading her to perdition. It's ungodly to think; it's devilish not to accept

the laws that idiots dictate to you. Is not their unanimity a guarantee of their infallibility? Unanimity! I believe it was the damned monotony of all that meek and mild psalm-singing which drove the poor devil to make that shindy in heaven; that is, if I allow that there is any truth at all in the story, which, by the way, I don't. Upon my soul, I'd like to try if one could bring up a girl to be a good woman, without propping her up with a lot of lies, and surrounding her with fences, which, if she had only wit enough to test a bit, she would find as rotten as the mischief."

"Well," said Guy, carelessly rocking himself on the hind legs of his chair, as he smoked, "try Nora Severne. I don't think any one will prevent you. They say she is as wild as a mountain deer; and that Miss Dixon's one desire is that the Lord may call Miss Nora before long. I'll look on, if you undertake her education, and give a few hints; there are some parts of a woman's education which I think you are not quite up to—eh, Jos?"

"Yes, I understand; you would come and make love to her. Women don't want any

teaching in the matter of wasting their life on some scoundrel, and breaking the heart of an honest fellow. They are most skilled in that art at an early age. Well, who knows, perhaps I might help the lass a bit. Her father was a weak fool, but a rare scholar."

"Do you know, Jos, it would not be bad to let the girl come sometimes. A secret is not suspected in a house where a young lady comes and goes."

"Suspected! Who would suspect us? The men are bound to us, they are only too glad to help us; it is all our risk, and their gain. When do you sail?" he added hastily. "Why the devil don't you start?"

"I don't trust Smashing Jack," Clifford said, without answering Thornton's question. "I tell you, Jos, if any man plays the traitor it will be John Trevane."

Thornton was silent for a minute or two; suddenly he raised his head and looked sharply at Clifford.

"He has a spite against you, I suppose. You have been playing with his sweetheart, maybe?"

"I don't think so; but, Lord, I am fond of

so many women that I should not be surprised if I ran foul of some fellow ; not that I want to hurt any poor fellow's feelings. There is not a woman I know whom I would not willingly give up to any one who wanted her."

Jos was silent for a minute, then lifted his head and looked Clifford in the face.

"Guy Clifford," he said slowly, "you are a fool !"

"Thank you."

"What a surpassingly great idiot you would be, if you really loved a woman !"

"Aye, if I did."

"You'll get into some scrape some day, and the devil himself won't get you out of it."

"I never heard of his lending his able assistance to deliver us from evil ; but you know more of his ways than I do."

Thornton took no notice of his jesting, but went on.

"You are hand in glove with Allan Moore, a fellow who is going to be a clergyman, a preaching hypocrite ; and who, when he finds out your secrets, will think it his duty to his own soul to disclose them."

Clifford suddenly changed his posture ; the

front legs of his chair reached the ground with a bang, and he bent forward.

"Jos, in spite of your hoary head, I must tell you disrespectfully to drop that subject. Allan is the soul of honour, clergyman or no clergyman. You'll please not to hint that he could be a sneak ; for if you assert it, you lie ! "

The last word rang through the little room ; and Guy's eyes flashed as such swiftly changing eyes only can.

Old Thornton seemed nothing daunted ; he gave a little whistle, then said quietly, " Very good, master, we'll see." After a minute he added slyly, " Can't you keep him out of the black gown ? It won't do him any good."

" Why should he not be a parson if he likes ? He has as much right to be a parson as I have to be a smuggler. What the devil does it matter to the rest of the world the line that a man takes ? "

" A parson ! " growled Jos. " All words and wind. If a man can't earn his bread and keep his mouth shut, he's not worth his salt. Oh, I am not afraid of you, Master Clifford," he added, refilling his pipe. " I'll say what I like."

The droll expression of the old man's face made Guy laugh.

"You see," Jos pursued, "it's all very well if a man believes in it. A man may steer for the Wolf Rock conscientiously, if he believes it lies ten fathoms deep; but if he knows his barque will strike, eh? Well, your friend Allan Moore must see to the bottom of it all, and yet he is going to drop into the profession, because it will give him food and grog."

"That's about the last thing Allan would trouble about."

"Then it's to please his old father, who has not a flicker of light in his old skull; or it's to be a gentleman. I'm blessed if I can find a sensible reason for any one being a parson."

"Can't you? Well, I can. If he is a good sort of fellow, he can say a cheery word to a man that's down on his luck; he can help many a poor devil who is hard up and won't beg. I think a man who is always at every one's beck and call might be rather a fine fellow."

"And pray, why need he make a parson of himself to do all that? If he is a parson, he is bound to wrap up every sweetie he gives to a child in a tract; he is bound to talk



rubbish when he does a kind deed ; he is bound to insist on people being all forms and ceremonies and outside ; and he is bound to grow every day more and more of a fool and a hypocrite !”

“Come, Jos, make a convert of Allan. There’s an opportunity for training the human mind. I don’t think he and Miss Severne can go in the same class though.”

“Bring him here, and I will talk to him. You might do worse.”

“After all, you see, every one wants to preach, though they are not professedly parsons !”

“Yes ; but the amateurs can be kicked if they are conceited, and the professionals can’t.”

“I’ll bring Allan to-morrow. I should like to watch his conversion. But now to business. I start on Wednesday, if the wind be favourable ; and shall be back in a couple of months.”

“The squire will be down here then. I know his sort—one of those men who are all for law and order. Their stern exposure of the iniquity of not paying duty on a keg of brandy will completely counterbalance their own slight offences, at which they are not caught. You

had better keep a sharp look out, Master Clifford. That squire will give us some trouble yet."

"I am not afraid of him, strange to say."

"Wait! a virtuous landed proprietor, interested in the right administration of law, doing his duty on his property, and laying out as much money as he can spare from his town dissipations in improving the condition of the ignorant boors, who are his serfs; knowing nothing, absolutely nothing, but how to dance and bow, and put on a coat, and seduce a woman. You will see he'll look sharply after our morals, so you had better not be caught tripping, master."

"Do you advise me to give up my trade, Jos? You think it too risky, perhaps?"

Jos laughed.

"Yes; that is what I mean—isn't it? No; there's not much chance of your giving it up. It's as honest a trade as any other. The boat is our own; we share profits with the men; the sea is our highway; the winds are our servants, and no force of argument, Socratic, Aristotelian, or otherwise, can convince us that a paternal government has a right to seize my goods and

make me pay it for what was never its property."

"Very neatly put, Jos ; though that is not the way I look on it at all. I'm damned if I think about the right and wrong of it ; but I am not going to be afraid of a few cowardly excisemen. I'll be as free as I choose. Why, the excitement of the thing is worth any price. When I stood on the deck of the *Sunlight* last month, and the revenue cutter gave chase, I was a man. I'd give ten years of my life to live the time over again. It was the nearest shave, running between those rocks with the wind up from the west'ard. The cutter was close behind us. We were carrying every rag we could, and she was not game for it, so we distanced her, and got into French water. By George ! it was blowing a living gale ; and if we had gone half a knot to leeward, we should have been smashed up."

Clifford was pacing too and fro, as if on the deck of his vessel.

"And you did not think of the awful fate of the cutter, if she had been driven on the rocks ?" asked Thornton, with mock solemnity.

"Serve her right. I did not ask her to chase me."

"Your friend Allan, in his professional capacity, would tell you that you were hurling souls into eternity."

"He would not talk that nonsense to me ; if he did I would soon silence him."

"Tut, tut ; I'll live to see you recant ; to see you a meek disciple of Allan Moore's, standing on a tub and jawing, perhaps ; or a magistrate of the county, keeping a wary eye on smugglers, and up to all their tricks, of course. God bless my soul, lad, it would be rare sport to see you respectable !"

The old man chuckled with intense enjoyment of his joke. Clifford stopped in his walk.

"There is nothing in me, Jos, to make me end like that. I'll *live* all my days, you may depend on it. No canting hypocrisy for me ; a short life and a merry one. By George ! it's a splendid world, if men were thorough enough to enjoy it. There's the dash of the waves and the west wind, the sunlight on the sails ; there's the kiss of a woman, and the laugh of a child ; there's good liquor, and a friend's voice.

I could never exhaust the list of good things in the world."

"But the youth goes, master; the youth goes like the dew on the grass."

"That's the worst of it, Jos; but, just at present, I feel as if I were possessed of immortal youth. Now I'm off to Moore. I wish you would open that class for the right training of men and women. But you must let them learn together," he added, with a laugh. "I'll enter the school at once; and when the scholars want recreation—the women, I mean—I'll take them a trip in my barque."

"Good night, Jos," Clifford said, as Thornton stood at the door. "I am not up to accounts just now; I'll look in to-morrow night."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### NORA WINS A TEACHER.

**F**OR a few minutes after Clifford left, Thornton sat with his eyes fixed on the fire ; then he got up, looked at the hammock, shook his head, and resumed his seat.

“So life goes,” he thought, “and there is not much done.”

His eyes turned to a strip of canvas, which hung above the fire-place ; on it were names and dates, very clearly written in Indian ink. These were the names of those who had been wrecked at Cairn Cove, and who had been brought to the cottage—some lifeless, some to be saved by Thornton’s care. Jos kept a book, numbered to correspond with this list, and in it was the chronicle of all he could learn about these waifs. Sad histories for the most part : a record of the little tokens by which, one day,

some desolate human soul might know that the one long sought, long watched for, had been buried in the village churchyard by the sea. Out of the list of twenty-five, six were marked as saved.

"Sent back to the world," thought Jos, "for God knows what evil luck; and then to die over again. I don't think I've done them a good service. They were gone, practically dead," he mused, "when I fetched them back again; gave them a devil of a lot of pain and bother, trying to blow the flicker of light into a flame, and then expected them to be grateful for it. One of them writes to me still, but the others are more sensible. I never got much satisfaction out of it. Not one of them could tell me where their souls got to, in that spell of bodily insensibility. Is it that they forget when they come back; or is it that the suspension of the pulse is the suppression of the soul, I wonder? I shall always go on wondering."

Thornton's eyes still went slowly down the list, and at last rested on the words—"Wilfred Thornton, aged twenty-five."

The date was some ten years back. If any

one had referred to the book of the wrecked, they would have found, opposite this name, a very short entry. "Washed ashore, quite dead. A woman's letter in his pocket." Yet Jos knew more of this man than of any of the others, for he was his own son.

The world of Cairn Cove knew little of Jos Thornton's antecedents, except that he was not a Cornishman, which was a negative sort of knowledge. He did not want them to know either, and never spoke of himself.

Let men take each other for what they are, and not for what they have been or may be. This was Thornton's view. He knew he was a scholar and a gentleman ; he did not want to prove it by telling his history. As he often said, those who founded their interest in people on the basis of their predecessors or possessions, could always find a book of county families, or the peerage, teeming with romance suited to their minds.

Thornton's was a sad story, but not a whit sadder than many another. This he knew, so he made his nets and built his boats uncomplainingly, with all the skill of his hands and force of his mind. This was one of his



reckoning days, and it was sad for him. It was the fifth of March.

You can't always keep your vessel head to the wind, when it is dead against you ; you must drift a bit when it's too strong. So Jos was drifting back into the past years.

Yes, it was a woman who had spoiled his boy's life ; with a pretence of virtue and a heap of empty laws, had crushed his hopes and driven the lad wild. So he had gone away to sea, as his father had done in his own youth ; and he had given no sign till that fifth of March, just at this hour, when, in the howling gale, his body was washed ashore, and his tale was ended.

Some fifteen years ago, Jos had come to Cairn Cove, with a vague feeling, perhaps, that the lives saved in that cottage might lay a debt on fate to give him back his son ; but the debt was paid so—"Wilfred Thornton, aged twenty-five. Washed ashore, quite dead. The fifth of March."

"A woman," Thornton reflected to-night. Perhaps Nora had unconsciously given new force to these thoughts. "Yes ; a woman always mars a man's life. The sweetest and

gentlest enervate men, the strongest wreck men's lives ; none of them see things simply ; they are full of complex feelings, in which their own vanities and whims are carefully concealed from themselves ; and they go to grief completely on what they are pleased to term religion, driving any wretch who loves them to the devil. Religion ! They are much too self-deceiving ever to understand what it really is ! That child who had stood in the garden this evening, he could pretty well foretell her career. She would be the scourge of some man's life ; lucky if she were not the scourge of two or three."

He began to think, would it be possible for a girl to grow up in a simple, straightforward way, not shirking pain, but taking it like a man, and looking things in the face ; not using the cant of what she called religion, to shield her from the result of her own vanity ; looking on life as a time for earnest, hard work, and not a time only for the play of a spoilt child.

Jos stretched his hands to the blaze and thought of Nora Severne.

She had a bonny face, not one of your skin-deep beauties that want a veil to keep

them lovely ; a world of freedom in her grey blue eyes. Yes, he was very lonely ; he thought he would like the child to come in sometimes. He could teach her a deal, and if she could only know the value of it, she would thank him for it some day ; but if not, if she proved a fool like most women, the learning would only swell her vanity, and make her more contemptible. A woman who thinks she knows something, good Lord ! Must their cleverness all go in deceiving themselves and others ? Why could not life be navigated rightly ? Why was the rudder to be lost, and the mainmast smashed in every heavy gale ? Why should there be wrecks—wrecks always ? Men and women were not fitly trained ; did not know when to carry on sail and when to shorten canvas.

Thornton's pipe had burnt out, but from old habit he kept it in his mouth, and felt content. He liked the face of that lass. He would talk to her a bit next time she came. It was strange to think of these growing lives. He had watched his boy, and thought him wise and strong ; and suddenly his life broke up, because of a woman. Here was he, Jos

Thornton, still interesting himself in poor, pitiful, human creatures. This careless dare-devil, who was here half an hour ago, he quite loved him, and would make a wretched old fool of himself if anything were to happen to the lad ; and this girl, he felt interested in her, already wanted to talk to the child, and began to speculate on the possibility of putting some sense into her head, and altogether was as stupid an old ass as could be. The gods had made such a blessed jumble of men. If they had set men free from sentiment of any kind, how smoothly things would go for them !

Well, it was time to turn in, so Jos took his sou'wester off the wall, put it on, opened the door, and went out to take his nightly survey of the sea and sky.

It was a wild night, the wind moaning and raging ; a dash of rain now and then, but not for long—the heavens were too wroth for tears. There was no sign of a light or sail, no sound of a distress signal ; but, looking keenly along the shore and up the cliff, Jos thought he saw the flutter of something white on the rocks above him. Making a tube with his hands, he gave a long shout, which went echoing

through the night air. Still he could see the white flutter, but there was no sound. It was very near the cliff's edge, dangerously near, this moving thing, whatever it was.

"Some fool of a woman," he muttered, "who has not the pluck to bear her contemptible life, nor yet the pluck to end it. I suppose I must go and look after her."

He turned up a path at the back of his cottage. He walked quickly; and as he drew near the object he had been looking at, he gave a snort of astonishment.

"Good Lord, it's that lass!" he said to himself, as he came up to her.

He took hold of her arm.

"What are you doing here?" he said roughly. "Why aren't you in your bed, like any other Christian child, eh?"

Nora gave a little start, looked vaguely at Thornton, as if trying to remember where she was, and then laughed a little.

"I was listening to the cry of the lost. I am not frightened—not at all. Is it not beautiful?" she added, lowering her voice till there was a tone of awe in it. "Look at the waves, how great and strong they are."

The sea roared below them, and dashed against the wall of rock, and the spray caught by the wild wind was hurled in their faces scornfully.

“Beautiful!” said the old man. “It’s a devouring monster, that can never be satisfied. Everything preys and devours—the sea, the winds, the earth, all ravenously gluttonous, and thoughts more than all else; they are the worst, for they crush and mutilate first, and then kill. I’ll tell you what it is, lass,” he added in a different tone; “you’ll be a prey to a cold and a cramp in your young bones, if you stay out here romancing. Come”—he drew her arm through his—“it’s a long time since a petticoat was within Jos Thornton’s doors, but I am going to take you to the cottage.”

He led her down the cliff as carefully as if she were feeble, and he were young and strong.

The fire had burned low when they came in, and Thornton began to try and mend it. Nora watched him for a minute, then knelt down and began to trim it herself, and blew the embers till she coaxed them into a flame. Jos drew back and let her do it. Presently

he said, as he stretched his hand to his pipe—"May I smoke?"

"Why not?" she answered, suspending her fire-blowing for a moment.

At last the flame shot up the broad chimney, and Nora paused in her efforts. She sat on the floor, her hands clasping her knees; her cheeks were flushed from the blaze; her eyes looked dreamily into the fire. Thornton watched her, and noticed the look of strength in her hands.

"What do you do with your life, lass?" he asked her abruptly.

"I don't know," she answered.

"Then you ought not to live."

"So people seem to think," she said scornfully.

"It does not matter about people; you ought to think so yourself."

"Why?"

"Life is for doing and working, not for slowly eating your way to your grave. Do you understand? Don't pretend to understand if you can't."

"I don't know anything. I must learn before I can act."

Thornton gave a short, scornful laugh.

"Pretty feminine humility! Have you learnt that already, child? Don't talk nonsense. You are too ignorant to know that you don't know."

Nora looked at him in a puzzled way.

"You think you know more than others, more than your sister, more than old Miss Dixon. Eyes like yours think they see. Come, what have you learnt? Do you know your Bible? It's very good reading. How old are you?"

"I shall be seventeen next September."

"In spring we count from the birthday to come, in autumn from the birthday that's past," Jos muttered. "Go on."

"I don't know the Bible well."

"Don't you? Then you had better learn it. I wish I had never read it; at least, I wish I had not read it with some one at my elbow spoiling it all. Read it by yourself, lass; and make what you can of it. Don't let any one tell you what they think. I have not looked at a Bible for twenty years. I'll begin again some day; but it will be no use. I'll never get that blessed singing out of my



head, which makes the whole thing witless. Now the other question?" he added.

"I know how to row and steer, and how to weave; I know Latin fairly, and can't make anything of Euclid, though I've tried very hard."

"Don't let anything beat you which you've once begun. You can learn it; but once you've learnt it, for God's sake, put it away and forget it. Calculations! What is the good of calculation to a woman?"

He was silent for a little while.

"How do you mean to go on?" he asked in a few minutes.

"I don't know. I don't think about it. I take what comes."

"You play with your sister, and love her, and your aunt?" he said quite gravely.

Nora laughed. It was a little, short, low laugh, not childish or happy.

"I do not like them at all," she said quietly, "and they hate me, I fancy; and I am very lonely." The end of the sentence was half whispered to herself.

"Well, it is not at all necessary to be loved; you can do without it. It's only greediness

to long for it; but you must love and hate too, at times, and if you don't, the sooner you are buried the better, for you are dead, quite dead, only a carcase, and that's not a decent sight."

"There is nothing to love," she said softly.

"Lies! How people will tell lies! Look at the earth and the sea and the sky. Does not the sun warm you, and the wind talk to you, and the earth smile at you? Pooh! Come," he said, getting up suddenly, "it's late; and I am going to take you home."

"I can go home alone."

"Can you? You are not a grand young lady, who wants to be taken care of?"

"No, I'm a poor girl; my mother was a milliner."

"Yes, I know; and a lady, if you please. The one does not prevent the other."

Nora stood up and put on her hat, which had dropped on the floor. As she tied it on, Thornton noticed that her eyes rested eagerly on the books.

"You want to read them?" he asked.

"Yes, please; those that I can read. I don't know Greek."

"Why should I not teach you everything I know? It's not much; but you may as well have the knowledge, if you like."

"Will you really?"

Her face changed, and looked quite warm and sweet in expression.

"Yes. Come in the evenings; and if you speak the truth and don't learn women's tricks and pretences, perhaps you won't come to a bad end. Good-night."

He held the door open for her, and stood bareheaded in the porch till she was out of sight, then he went in.

"No one can tell at any age what their conduct may be," he muttered. "I am sure, I never could have guessed that I should be such a damned old fool as to teach a girl. A girl!" he repeated, with an accent of complete contempt, as he lay down on his stretcher, dressed as he was.

Since the first night that he came to the cottage, Jos had slept in his clothes, ready at once when from the sea there came a cry for his help.

## CHAPTER IX.

## LOVE AND LEARNING.

THE next day Nora's studies with Thornton began.

"I believe," said Jos, as he opened the garden gate for her, when it began to grow dusk, "I promised to help you. It is a trouble, lass; but a promise is a promise with some people."

There was a funny twinkle in his eyes. Nora did not feel offended at his words, or offer to go away. His manner put her at her ease.

"You know how to read and write, I suppose? You have learnt a few necessities of that sort, I fancy," Thornton said, as they sat down. "I wonder whether you can understand this at all."

Then he took up Plato's "Republic," and handed it to Nora.

"Read it to me," he said.

Nora began timidly, at first; but, as she continued, and grew interested, she read well. The old man nodded his head from time to time with pleasure. Her voice was full and soft; she read with simplicity and expression. He interrupted her after a time.

"I like to go as far back as I can," he said, "and get as near the source as possible. Plato is the basis of nearly all poetic philosophy. I know we can go further back still, but I stop at Plato. He is colossal, and overshadows thought before and after him. Go on, now."

Then Nora read again; but he soon interrupted her.

"Do you know what Bacon says on the same subject?" alluding to the last lines she had read. "Bacon had a taint in his mind—the taint of worldliness and expediency—but he has said wise things."

Then Thornton talked on for a while, touching on the thoughts of philosophers since Bacon's time till much later years, finding the likeness and unlikeness of their ideas, linking

them together, and leading Nora to question him and say all that arose in her mind. This she did timidly, at first ; but afterwards with such eager interest that self was forgotten.

“Don’t imagine I sneer at one thinker reproducing the ideas of another,” he said. “No. We all draw from each other. There is a heavy debt of gratitude lying on the whole race, and what we owe to the past we pay to the future. Only those who are not thinkers become robbers, if they handle the thoughts of other men. They are mental bankrupts ; they must take learning as beggars, and acknowledge the gift ; that’s the only honest dealing for them.”

Thus he talked on. He liked to discourse while intelligent eyes were fixed on him. He was proud of being a scholar ; there was not a gentleman in the county knew as much. But he was not boastful of it, and cared not for the wondering admiration of the ignorant. In his ordinary life he was a clever boat-builder and a shrewd man, with quaint ways, that was all.

Nora was not surprised to hear Thornton talk thus. She was only filled with a desire to understand.

Two hours passed without fatigue on either side; then there came a knock at the door, quickly followed by the entrance of Allan Moore. Nora stood up and questioned old Jos, by a look, whether she should go. She feared her presence being an intrusion.

"Don't go," he said quickly.—"Good evening, Mr. Moore," he said to Allan.

The latter bowed to Nora.

"You wonder what I've come for, don't you?" Allan asked, sitting down near the table, and smiling as he spoke. "In old times," he continued, "people came from far to the wise men of the land. Well, Clifford has sent me to the seer of Cornwall."

"I don't know myself by that title, but I suppose you mean me," answered the old man. "I hate flattery, Mr. Moore."

Allan flushed.

"I did not mean to flatter. Clifford advised me to come and ask you to help me in my studies for my examinations."

Thornton looked at him for a moment, then laughed heartily.

"I am to prepare you for the Church! I am to fit you for the ministry! Distort learn-

ing, sacred and profane, into a vehicle for the expression of a set of narrow, intolerant dogmas—eh? Is Master Guy mad? I'll teach you to build boats, sir, or make nets, if you like; but the other business you must give to other hands."

"But, sir," protested Allan, "we have not only to take up religious subjects; we must study Greek and Latin and science, and all sorts of things."

Thornton looked at him with a scornful twitch in his lips.

"Bless your soul, I know all that; but the learning is to make you think—is it not? It's to build up your mind; and in your case, master, it's to run in a groove, and I'm not up to guiding it there."

After a pause of a second or two, he added—

"They say you've a turn for painting or poetry."

"I like them both."

"Why did you come to me, of all people?" Thornton asked inquisitively.

"Guy said you would help me. It is hard to work alone."

"Then, by my faith, I will help you. I never



refused help to any one yet, except help to die, and that is too great a boon ever to be given."

"Thank you. When may I come?"

"About this hour every day; but, mind you, I'll say what I like. I'm an old heathen; I am not going to respect your views, for you haven't any real ones yet."

"That sounds a bit intolerant, Mr. Thornton."

"Don't 'Mr. Thornton' me. It's not intolerant. You are only a lad, not grown up in intellect, which you ought to know, if there is anything in your head. By-and-by, if you make up your mind as to what you think of life and death and religion, I'll say no more. I'll not interfere with any one's convictions. There are minds, I suppose, whose only way of seeing God is through the medium of shaded light, chantings and bowings, cassocks and hassocks, candles and chancels, and such like. Well, so long as they see Him, it's something. There are others who see Him in the dash of the waves and roar of the wind, in their own souls, in the souls of the vilest, in the blue sky, in the flowers, may be. I belong to the last lot, thanks be to the Lord."

Allan smiled.

"A Pharisee, eh?" Jos asked. "You're mistaken. Men say the same words, and mean differently. I'll wager this lass understands better, though she is a young girl, and you are—a man of genius!"

Jos said the last words in a tone of irony. He wanted to see if Allan would be offended, and liked him better when he heard his frank laugh.

"We are forgetting all about Miss Severne," said Allan, turning towards her, after Thornton's allusion to her presence.

Nora had been sitting very still, listening to every word. She was glad of Thornton's quaint, rough answers, and anxious that Allan should feel the force of them. She was strongly interested in Allan Moore. She had seen him often before—seen and scarcely noticed; it was different to watch him now. Something in his face reminded her of her father, something in the refined brow and dreamy eyes. These were living creatures that she could take delight in; not cold, unemotional beings; not people who were passively opposed to her always, like Miss Dixon and Catherine, who

seemed to freeze all sympathy, and make the world ugly by their very presence.

"*I* had not forgotten Miss Nora," said old Jos; "and now you had better take her home, for it is over dark for the lass to be straying about alone."

"I don't mind; I'm not frightened," Nora said quickly, flushing as she spoke.

"I should like to take you home, if I may?" Allan said gently.

"Then be off, and no more talk about it," said the old man, getting up from his chair.

So they said good-bye, and went. Thornton stood in the porch, and watched them go out of sight.

"They'll be falling in love with each other, I suppose," he muttered, as they disappeared down the road. "Half an hour will do it sometimes, when the moon is up and the blood is young; and a lifetime won't cure you of the distemper. It's unhealthy to be out at night; I always said so. The west wind and the stars, every blessed thing in heaven and earth, is in the plot to make fools of men."

Meanwhile, Allan and Nora walked together. The latter felt glad, she scarcely knew why.

Life seemed changed for her. She felt a desire to be brighter, prettier, cleverer. She wanted to make this walk pleasant to Allan Moore.

"You don't dislike coming with me? It does not keep you out too long?" Then, without waiting for a reply, she went on, "It is so beautiful. Look at the light on the water, far out to sea, how it dances! It would be glorious on the waves to-night."

"I am going out to the *Sunlight* presently, to bid my friend Clifford good-bye; he sails early to-morrow morning."

"And I am taking you in the contrary direction." She stood still as she spoke.

"That does not matter; I'll walk quickly back."

"No, I'll go home alone," she said firmly, "unless—I go with you to the *Sunlight*."

Allan looked at her in astonishment. This was an extraordinary girl.

Nora laughed.

"You are surprised. Why should I not go? I always do what I wish. Who cares? They don't interfere with me. I always mean to do what I wish. Why should I not? But,

perhaps, I should be in the way; I never thought of that."

Allan felt puzzled. It seemed quite natural to Nora to do this, and he found no argument to oppose to her wish.

"I can sit quietly on deck till you have finished talking to your friend, and then come back with you."

"You will be scolded if it should be found out."

"I don't want to hide it. I pay no attention to scoldings; they have no meaning when they come from people who do not like me."

"Then we will go."

As he spoke they turned, and took the path to the sea.

"How astonished Clifford will be!" he added.

Nora looked fixedly at Allan as they walked, without embarrassment, for she was trying to read his thoughts.

He would look mentally to the right and left of things always, thought Nora. She never felt inclined to do that herself. He was to be a clergyman, she had heard. He did not look

as if the profession would suit him. How could he give up art for anything? He had not the soul of an artist. The delight of making things, fashioning them out of his brain—could anything be like that joy?

Allan turned to speak to Nora, and saw her eyes fixed on him.

"I beg your pardon," she said quickly; "I was thinking."

"Of what? Do you mind telling me?"

"Of people and things—of life, of art. Does it not teach you a great deal to paint and write? Does it not make you understand? Don't you see more than I do in the sunsets and in people's faces? Don't you feel strong and independent, and able to make a world of your own?"

"I don't feel independent. I do not think we are meant to be. Obedience is the law of life and art."

Nora's expression was scornful.

"Yes; I really mean it," Allan went on.

"It sounds like a very old person."

"I suppose it does," he answered, laughing. "But there's the boat, and I can't talk wisely any more."

They had reached the creek, where one of the sailors, Walter Haworth, was waiting.

Nora sprang into the boat before any one could help her.

"Let me take an oar," she said, as she sat down.

Allan steered, and as he watched Nora he admired her beautifully shaped head with its clustering curls, her dark blue eyes set in shadow; but he thought it would have been better if she had been a man. Her hands were too strong, her skin too brown, her figure too lithe and active for womanly beauty.

Clifford was on the look-out for the boat, and hailed Allan as he came alongside.

"Not up to time, old fellow," he called out; then added suddenly, on catching a glimpse of Nora, "but who, in the name of fortune, have you got with you?"

Allan did not answer till they were on board, and Clifford could see for himself, then he said—

"Miss Severne wanted to stand on the deck of your ship, and see the light on the water—wanted to watch the west wind, and a host of other things; so I could not refuse to bring her."

"I am honoured," said Clifford.

His eyes flashed as he spoke, and he bent a little towards her. Suddenly Nora felt shy, and moved a little nearer to Allan.

"Will you let me sit on deck by myself till you have ended your talk with Mr. Moore? I shall feel I ought not to have come, if I disturb you."

"You shall do whatever you like; but as to disturbing us, it's delightful to see you, and you will bring good luck to us this trip."

Clifford brought a chair and his rug, and made Nora comfortable, looking at her admiringly for a minute as he did so, then took Allan's arm and strolled to the bow.

"Upon my word," Clifford said, as soon as they were out of hearing. "I should never have suspected you of this sort of thing! Why the devil could you not have told a fellow beforehand, so that I might have made some sort of arrangement for the girl's comfort? And, mind you, I won't take her one inch out of harbour, unless you swear to me on your honour, as a gentleman, that she is going of her own free will."

Allan stared at him for a minute, then burst into laughter.



"Did you think it was an elopement, Clifford? Poor Miss Severne! Oh!"

Then again he laughed.

"Well, what's the meaning of it?"

"Simply a whim of the girl's. I said I was coming, and she said she would like to come, too."

"Well, you are a fool, Allan. You'll get her into a nice scrape. It was damned selfish of you to bring her, let me tell you."

"We'll go back shortly, and it will be all right."

Clifford was silent for a minute, then said suddenly—

"Since she has come, I don't see why she should not stay and have supper. Perhaps she would like to stay with me altogether. I should not be surprised. Just wait here for me."

He turned away from Allan, and went up to Nora.

"The *Sunlight* is hospitable," he said; "you must stay and sup with us."

Nora was looking out seaward, watching the shadows on the water, and the distant boats; listening to the sound of the sails lazily flap-

ping against the mast, and to the voices of the fishermen, which came from a long way off on the still air. She was living in imagination a sailor's life, revelling in the freedom of the dashing waves, and great open sea. She started when Clifford spoke to her.

"Oh, thank you, no," she said quickly; "but go to supper, you and Mr. Moore; I can wait. I would much rather sit here," and again she looked out seawards.

"Yes; but as an honour to the captain you will come?"

"I will if you both like it," she answered, rising; "but it is nicer here."

"Then I'll have supper brought up, and we'll take it *al fresco*. Sit down again."

Clifford walked away to give his orders. Nora smiled.

He did not understand that supper on deck and conversation of a limping kind was not at all as pleasurable as sitting by herself in the dim light and dreaming. She felt sure that Allan Moore would have understood. She had not thought of staying out so long, when she had impulsively begged to go with Allan; but it was only just that she should wait his

pleasure now, and she did not expostulate. They influenced each other strangely, these three. Clifford was full of attention to Nora, yet he, who from childhood had been a favourite with women, felt that he lacked the power to please this girl. There was something fascinating and mysterious to him in the depths of her blue eyes, and the curves of her lips; but Nora slightly resented his air of gallantry, scarce knowing that she did so, turning her head more frequently towards Allan, and finding all he said more interesting. Allan paid no special heed to her, except that he looked at her with pleasure, when she talked brightly and intelligently. She would be a faithful friend and ally, he thought; but for a girl, not really wanting in beauty, she was strangely unattractive, unlovable.

They talked of Jos Thornton, of France, of a sailor's life, of many things, not very wise nor yet very foolish.

"I hope you won't get into a scrape about coming to the *Sunlight*," Clifford said to Nora. "I shall be very cross if your visit, which we have enjoyed, should get you into trouble afterwards."

“What can they do?” Nora answered. “Why should people be afraid of blame? It doesn’t change things—does it, that people should approve or scold?”

“Must we not think of others sometimes?” said Allan.

He did not like this theory of Nora’s, it seemed to be ungentle.

“Yes, I suppose so, if it will do them any good.”

“Bravo,” said Guy.

Nora did not care for his applause, she watched for Allan’s reply.

“We must think of their feelings, their wishes, even their whims. We can’t march through life trampling on everybody,” Allan answered.

“It’s only cowardice and laziness, which makes us draw back from doing what we want. I don’t understand why we should not walk straightforward. We need not trample on people. We can’t really hurt any one but those who love us. Who can hurt me? No one; for I love no one.”

She threw back her head, and glanced round with a fearless gesture. Clifford looked at her

with a glow of admiration, and a desire to make her life less desolate. He had never seen a woman like her. Allan thought the *pose* of her head admirable in its expression of independence and scorn ; but thought it a pity that there was not some softening influence in her life, and fancied that association with Evelyn Holt would improve her.

“You are as much alone in the world as I am,” said Clifford, bending a little across the table, and looking into Nora’s eyes. “I believe I had a father and mother—I suppose I must have had a *raison d’être* ; but I don’t know what they were like—no one has ever told me about them.”

“But you have your home here,” she said quickly, looking round her ; “and you’ve made friends with the winds and the waves ; and then I’ve heard people say that you and Mr. Moore are better than brothers ; so you see you are not like me, after all.”

She had grown very talkative. All the silence and reserve of her daily life seemed suddenly to have left her. She was excited. She wanted this evening not to end ; wanted these two men to speak out their thoughts as

freely as she spoke hers, so that she might draw near human souls, and see into lives which were different from her own life.

“Can’t you join our fraternity?” Guy said eagerly. “You and Moore and I; we could be very good friends—could we not? Let us base our association on good fellowship, republicanism, and unconventionality. Let us swear to be honest and true to one another, and to hate respectability and hypocrisy!”

Nora did not answer; she was watching Allan’s face, and waiting to hear what he would say. He was thinking of Evelyn, and mentally objecting to any association which did not include her.

“I can’t join you at all,” he said, laughing; “for I’m not a republican. I like kings and crowns; they look well in a picture, and are quite right anywhere. I hate breaking down customs and institutions, and making a Donnybrook Fair of life; it would be so ugly. How I ever came to make friends with this good-for-nothing, harum-scarum fellow, Guy Clifford, I can’t explain; and the worst of it is, I can’t break with him.”

Nora saw his dark eyes glow as he looked at

his friend, and suddenly she felt very lonely—very far away from every one. She was silent for a minute, then said—

“The moon is rising. I should like to look at the water.—When you are going,” she added, turning to Allan, “will you tell me?”

Then she got up and walked away from them, and stood gazing down into the dark water. How black it looked there! All the darker, because a little further off the moon was silvering the waves.

“Well, Clifford,” Allan said, when Nora had left them, “you’ll be away two months, I suppose. By the time you return, perhaps, I shall have decided about my life. There are so many claims, so many things to think of, but they must all be faced sooner or later.”

“The sooner the better, Allan. Indecision is loss of life.”

He was looking towards Nora as he spoke.

“You are not paying much attention to me, Guy. When there is a woman on the scene you never do.”

“I was thinking how lonely that poor child yonder is. I’ll lay my life there are

tears in her heart, if not in her eyes, at this moment."

"She is made of sterner stuff than you imagine. I fancy she has not a very soft nature."

"Perhaps not," Clifford said abruptly; "but then I never admired demonstrative women."

"Do you know," he added with a laugh, "I think you had better take her home now, for she shows no desire to go to France with me! She does not even look particularly pleased with my little attentions. It will be near ten by the time you reach the Dell; and, I think, it will be strange if her late hours do not meet with some unpleasant commentary. You are a very quiet-looking fellow; but, upon my soul, to take a young girl off on board a trading cutter is pretty well for a beginner!"

"To tell you the truth, I did not think much about it. I am thinking of so many things of late. I am so angry that thoughts worry me, and stop my work. A man ought to be completely absorbed by whatever he is doing, specially by work of an imaginative nature, and ought not to let his mind be affected by outside events. Why can't we



keep thought under control, and follow unbrokenly one subject? Everything we do would be so much better done, if it were so. Lately, I have quite broken down at my art—have not been able to work out an idea into anything like its fit expression—and this is because everything unsettles me; my thoughts rush off, and I have to coax them back. There is no repose in my life.”

“And there won’t be, till you know what port you are sailing for. But now, look here, Allan, you must take Miss Severne home. It’s hardly fair to keep her here late. Of course, I don’t care a snap of my fingers about what people say, neither does she, I fancy; but she is very young, and I don’t think we ought to give rise to lies about her. So now drop your rambling talk about your feelings, and be off.”

Allan got up. He sighed wearily, as if he could not shake off the thoughts that were worrying him. Clifford went over to Nora, and told her that Moore was going.

“It was good of you to stay,” he began, a little nervously. “The *Sunlight* and her skipper are quite proud.”

"Isn't it grand out at sea in a storm," interrupted Nora, not having heard a word he had said, "when the clouds are quite black above, and the waves seem to tower over the vessel? Have you time to notice it all, or are you so occupied about the ship that you think of nothing but that?"

"One notices everything, but not in a romantic sort of way. Well, I suppose one sees things very much as a hunter sees a landscape; he chiefly exults in the gallant way his horse takes his fences. I can tell you it is splendid to see the *Sunlight* ride out a gale!"

"I wonder, shall I ever see a great storm at sea! I should like to be tied to a mast to watch it all, and be out of everybody's way."

"You would not be frightened?"

"No, I think not. Why should I?" Her eyes looked into Guy's with their peculiarly fearless expression. "I might be frightened," she added. "It is stupid to talk so, when I've no experience."

"I don't think you would ever be afraid of anything."

"You do not know. But I must go ; Mr. Moore is waiting."

Nora walked quickly across the deck, and as she did so she slipped her foot and fell. She was up again in a minute, but she winced and turned very white.

"You have hurt yourself," Allan said, springing forward. He had a singular tenderness of manner when any one was suffering.

"It is nothing ; but I must wait a minute till the pain is gone."

The pain, however, did not go. Nora found she could not walk. How was she to get back to The Dell ? Here was a dilemma.

"We can let you down into the boat," said Clifford ; "and when we land, Allan and I can carry you home."

"I'll agree to any plan."

So they lowered Nora most gently into the boat, and rowed quickly to shore.

"Now," said Clifford, "Allan and I must make a sedan chair of our hands ; then you put an arm round each of our necks, and we can get along famously."

"Why should I take you both so far ?" Nora said.—"Perhaps you," she added, turn-

ing to the sailor who had rowed them, "would not mind carrying me?"

"You are not going to deprive me of that pleasure, I can tell you," said Guy, laughing.

Then he and Allan joined hands and stooped to lift her.

"If you wish to be steady and comfortable," he added, "you must not be partial in your embrace."

So she laughingly placed herself as she was told, and they started.

Notwithstanding Clifford's recommendation to impartiality, Nora's arm clung a little more round Allan's neck. That evening, as the two friends carried Nora up The Dell avenue, and put her gently down at the hall door, she made choice of her life, unconsciously but irrevocably. They both spoke to her, but she only heard Allan Moore; they both took her hand, but she was only conscious of Allan's touch. She lingered a little on the steps, though her hurt ankle pained her intensely; she wanted to hear Allan's voice. At last she parted from the two men, and went in. Clinging to the bannister, she dragged herself slowly upstairs, but with a heart so light that she.

laughed at her own pain. A week ago the world had been a shadowy place, now it was full of light and colour; the morrow and all oncoming days were gilded by the brightness of her own thoughts.

## CHAPTER X.

### ANTAGONISM.

THE next morning, Miss Dixon was so exceedingly absorbed in prospective arrangements for a party, which she intended to give at The Dell, that she did not at first notice Nora's crippled condition, but at last, seeing that she limped from the breakfast-table, she said—

“I suppose you have sprained your ankle on some of your extraordinary expeditions. Perhaps it will teach you to be more ladylike, and to remember that you might find some more suitable amusement than romping with the village children.—By the way,” she said, turning to Catherine, without waiting for Nora to reply, “I don't think fritters look anything like as elegant as a shape of jelly; fritters don't make enough show for the money, and

we must be particular if we are going to ask Squire Armfield."

What special delight was decided on for the squire Nora did not hear, as Miss Dixon and Catherine got up and adjourned to the store-room, to find inspiration amongst the jam pots.

Nora smiled. She knew that the goal of Miss Dixon's ambition was to be a person of importance at Cairn Cove, and to marry Catherine to a man of good position ; and also she knew that pleasing visions of being the moving power in Catherine's house, floated before Miss Dixon's eyes.

In the dining-room at The Dell there was a deep bay window, and the recess in which it was formed almost a little room. Here there was an old-fashioned sofa, and Nora brought her books and lay down. She was a little impatient at first at being a cripple, but by-and-by she forgot about it, and became absorbed in her reading. She was very eager to know, to enter into that world which seemed familiar to old Jos and to Allan Moore. When they talked in her presence, she wanted fully to understand the subjects of which they

spoke. She felt that delightful onward stretch in her mind, which made her long to grasp all knowledge at once, and which fretted the calm of her study. The hours seemed too short, her powers too feeble to satisfy her desires.

Presently she looked up, and saw Guy Clifford standing at the window. She blushed when she saw him. He opened the window, and sat down on the ledge.

"I thought you sailed this morning," Nora said.

"Something went wrong with the ship's rigging, and she cannot sail till to-night. I came to see how you are this morning."

How handsome Clifford looked ! His sailor's jersey showed his well-formed brown throat, and the thick masses of his curly hair peered from under his sou'wester. His was a fine, bright, generous face, but Nora did not look at him with any special admiration ; it was too frank a countenance for her nature, a face that told its tale too simply. To fire her imagination, a face must somewhat conceal its soul, and lead her on with the desire and hope of discovering all its secret beauty.

"My ankle pains ; but it would have been



much worse if you and your friend had not carried me home," Nora answered. She wanted Guy to talk about Allan.

"Being clumsy fellows, I suppose we did it roughly."

As he spoke, Miss Dixon walked into the room. She had heard voices, and came to inform herself.

Clifford muttered a short curse, then got in at the window and shook hands with Miss Dixon.

"Well," she said, "it's not often you favour us with a visit, Captain Clifford. Does Catherine know you are here? Will you call her, Nora?" she added.

"No, no," interposed Guy hastily; "for goodness' sake don't walk.—I only came," he said, turning to Miss Dixon, "to inquire for Miss Nora's ankle."

"How did you know she had hurt herself?" she asked quickly.

Here was Clifford in a difficulty. He looked at Nora, and seeing that she appeared placid, he said at once—

"I met your niece yesterday, after she had sprained her foot."

"Oh, indeed," Miss Dixon remarked with an incredulous sniff.

"Do you care to know exactly how it happened?" Nora asked. "I went on board the *Sunlight*. I slipped on deck, and hurt myself so much that Mr. Clifford and his friend, Mr. Moore, had to carry me home."

Guy felt inclined to say "Bravo."

Miss Dixon was utterly confounded. She rubbed her hands, as she always did when she was in perplexity, then said sharply—

"Your amusements are peculiar, Miss Nora."

"I don't think I have any at all. My attempt at amusement yesterday was not very successful." She looked at her ankle ruefully.

"When I come back from this trip," said Clifford, "I think I must give a party on board the *Sunlight*. Will you come?" he added, turning to Nora.

"I don't like parties."

"She prefers private visits, and likes being carried home by two gentlemen," said Miss Dixon, seizing her opportunity.

Nora flushed painfully. It was not the reproof, but the vulgarity of the remark which hurt her.

"The mode of transit was certainly not delightful," said Clifford quickly. "It was a most jogging, uneasy kind of conveyance."

Then he stood up to go. Miss Dixon, having calculated that by this time Catherine had adorned herself sufficiently, said hastily—

"Since Nora is unable to move, I will call my niece. You will like to see Catherine; and I think she wants to ask you something about France."

Clifford began to explain that he was too much hurried to delay any longer, but Miss Dixon was gone before he could finish his sentence.

"You thought I wanted to hide having been on board the *Sunlight*?" Nora said, the moment Miss Dixon had left the room.

"I did not know what you would like me to say."

"I am past the age of being put in the corner and given nothing but bread and water," she answered, with a smile; "and Miss Dixon cannot inspire awe. Is it possible for her to command me by the force of her mind?"

"No," said Guy, laughing; "yet, by George,

I'd do a great deal to escape her remarks. She is not a pleasant old lady."

"I live with her," Nora said significantly. "There is no escape."

"I wish there was some escape for me now. I really must get back. I cannot stay for a polite conversation with Miss Severne."

"Then why should you not go quickly before she comes? Jump out of the window, and run away."

"I have only come to see how you are. Tell me, does your foot pain much? Allan wants to know, too."

He came close to the sofa and took her hand. Her face, always pale, was whiter than usual to-day, and the shadows round her eyes seemed deeper. Clifford, as he looked at her, began to think that he had never seen any woman like her; not one that had such fearless strength in her eyes, not one that was so free from self-consciousness. The full, finely-curved lips, which drooped a little at the corners, as will always droop the lips of those who are much alone—the lips of those who talk and laugh rarely; the long sweep of her neck, which showed more now from the back-

ward bend of her head on the sofa pillows; the bright colour of her disordered hair, which tumbled waywardly over her low forehead; the graceful lines of her well-proportioned girlish figure, which even her coarse dress could not disguise—all this Clifford noticed swiftly with admiration. He was very impressionable, fell violently in love with most women who were tolerably comely, and was most easily won by their slightest overture; but, to-day, he was angry with himself for feeling one thrill of passion similar to that which the past had brought him.

“How kind Mr. Moore is!” Nora said, without answering Clifford’s question. “Will you thank him for me? I shall soon be able to walk again; please tell old Jos. Now you must run, if you do not wish to be caught; I hear footsteps. Good-bye.”

Clifford laughed, sprang out of the window, and disappeared.

Catherine sailed into the room. She did not perceive till she reached the recess that Clifford was no longer there.

“Aunt Barbara said that Captain Clifford wished to see me,” she said.

“That was not strictly true. He was so alarmed at the prospect of such splendour that he ran away !”

Nora could not resist this little jest. Catherine’s eyes threw out a gleam. It was a peculiarity of theirs when she was annoyed.

“Of course I could not appear till I was dressed ; one member of the family in that sort of attire was enough.” She pointed significantly to Nora’s costume. “Could you not have managed to keep him for a few minutes ? You might have tried to be agreeable for once.”

“I don’t know how,” Nora answered ; and took up her book.

“Do you not ? Then how came you to be invited to the *Sunlight* ?”

“I invited myself.”

“Oh !” After a pause, Catherine added, “Was it not a strange thing to do ? But I need not ask you. You like to make yourself remarkable, and do what other girls would not do.”

“I wish you would let me read, Catherine.”

“Tell me what you did on board. What was the pleasure of being there ?”

"I sat on deck ; afterwards I had supper ; afterwards I twisted my ankle ; afterwards I was carried home. As to the pleasure, you could not understand it."

She was thinking of the sea and the moonlight. In imagination she was again looking on the water, again dreaming the same dreams.

"The pleasure to you," said Catherine, "was being alone with a lot of men ; but you ought to know that men never admire girls that run after them."

Nora's calm eyes looked at her very fixedly.

"I think it is ugly of you to say that."

Catherine laughed.

"I think it so much uglier to shock every one by doing wild things. Really, Nora, you are not a remarkable enough girl to set society at defiance, even the society of Cairn Cove. Ask aunt," she added, as Miss Dixon came into the room.

"What are you going to ask me ? Not that it is any use, for you never pay any respect to anything I say."

"I did not want to ask anything." Then, with a slight smile Nora added, "I think it is rather cruel of you both to take advantage of

my being unable to run away, and to attack me when I am at your mercy."

Thus she tried to give a jesting tone to the conversation.

"Well or ill," Miss Dixon said blusteringly, "I mean to speak my mind to you. You may not have any respect for yourself, but you must learn to have some for your family, and not go prancing about the neighbourhood, picking up acquaintances here and there. You must not go alone on board ship, and be carried home at night by men. I tell you, I won't have it," she added, with foolish weak anger. "You must remember who your father was. Your mother, of course, was nobody; but I am at the head of your father's house, and I am a Dixon of Galtree, and I fancy I ought to know what is correct."

Nora sat upright with a jerk, though she winced from pain.

"I'd like quite to understand," she said quickly. "Do you expect me to obey you, and be guided by you? Because that is quite impossible. You are no relation of mine. I have no sympathy with you. If I obeyed you, it would be quite blindly and foolishly.



I could not yield my will to yours, thinking yours law ; I am not young enough or stupid enough for that. If I cannot think for myself or act for myself here, I must go away."

"You would go away to starve," Miss Dixon said sneeringly.

"That would not matter. There are some things more important than living ; at least, *I* think so. It is cruel and contemptible to try and crush me into a life which is not life, without an aim, without brightness, bound by rules which I am not silly enough to find any meaning in. Can you not leave me alone ? I keep away from you ; I never spoil your parties by appearing at them. Of course you don't love me ; you've left me without one scrap of love all my life. You tried to take my father's love away, but you could not. You and Catherine are happy together, and fond of one another. You can't make me at all like yourselves, so please leave me in peace."

Catherine listened to all this with a slight smile. She liked to see Nora angry. She glanced at her aunt, and shrugged her shoulders.

The descendant of the great house of Dixon

of Galtree did not bear herself with dignity ; she got very red in the face, and looked helplessly angry.

“If you were like any one else,” she burst out at last, “you would be loved. There is no use making a scene, and upsetting me. I wash my hands of you. You must go your own way ; but perhaps you’ll take the trouble of explaining to all your low friends that it is not with Miss Dixon’s approval that you lead the life you do. It is due to your sister to acknowledge that she has not the same tastes.”

Suddenly Nora began to laugh. Her anger had vanished, and the whole scene struck her as very ludicrous, as she looked at Miss Dixon’s emptily important expression.

“I beg your pardon,” she said quickly ; “I don’t mean to be rude ; but it is so funny that we should sit here, getting angry with one another and making indignant speeches, when really what you say does not convince me, and what I say does not convince you.” Again Nora laughed. “I wish,” she added, “you would let me have my father’s little library. I could sit there, and you need never be worried by me, except at meals.”

"Give you your father's study to receive your low friends in, and bring discredit on the house! Certainly not! I know my duty better; and so long as you live with me I will not countenance your ways."

Nora was still amused. Oh, for some one to share the fun of it; but she looked in vain at Catherine for a responsive smile. At last, after a silence of a few minutes, Nora said—

"You will insist on my being serious; you won't see how ridiculous it is to try and magnify me into a monster of selfishness and wickedness, so I am going to be serious to please you." Her voice was very quiet in tone, but unmistakably earnest. "I like the village people; they are good and simple. I like old Jos Thornton; he is kind and clever, and can teach me, so I'll be friends with him as long as I live, if he will allow me. Wherever I find kindness and love, I'll go, for I do not find it here; have never found it since my father died."

Her lips quivered just a little; but there was no other sign of emotion in her face.

Miss Dixon was not kind and generous, neither had she enough fixity of character to be

continuously unkind, therefore she felt uncomfortable at these words of Nora's. Catherine saw the changing expression in her aunt's face, and thought it was time to speak.

"You were quite determined not to find it, Nora. I know I was quite ready to like you, and be kind to you ; but you never came near me. Oh no ; nobody felt sorry for papa, except you ! Indeed, I fancy you thought we were rather glad he had died ! It would be very nice for me," she continued, leaning back in her chair, and twisting her rings round her fingers, "to have a sister who shared my pleasures, and was affectionate—of course I should enjoy it ; but I cannot like you to be disrespectful to aunt, and to think yourself so much better than others, and to do all sorts of wild things for no reason at all. Why should we not be fond of you, if you were nice ? and why do you talk in that absurd way about not being loved ?"

There was no tenderness in Catherine ; her pitiless lips gave the lie to her words. But though this long speech fell without effect on Nora's ear, it restored Miss Dixon to self-complacency. Of course Kate was right, and

if Nora was not loved, she had herself to blame.

Nora got up and hobbled to the door. Before she left the room she stood still for a minute, and said, with a little sad smile—

“I don’t think there is any use talking about this and getting angry. I can’t change myself. I must live my own life, and have my own friends ; and there is nothing disgraceful in what I do. I cannot hurt you, Kate. I think we are only really loved for what we are, not for what we seem ; and you know all my dreadful deeds cannot alter you, or make you the least bit like me.”

Then Nora left the room.

Miss Dixon and Catherine feeling vaguely worsted in the conflict, fell back on each other for comfort.

“Nora is really the most obstinate, provoking girl,” Miss Dixon began. “She has no common-sense, and no respect for authority.”

Catherine laughed.

“You don’t really believe in all that pretended innocence, do you, aunt ? Of course, Nora knows as well as I do, that it is not right to go off alone amongst a lot of men ; but

perhaps she grew desperate, as no one paid her any attention ! ”

“ She is not a girl whom men will ever admire,” Miss Dixon remarked musingly ; “ she has such a cold face, and is so—so—I don’t know how to describe it.”

“ She has no heart at all,” answered Catherine, setting her lips cruelly, “ though she talks so much about it. Perhaps that is the reason she does not know how to behave herself. I always feel what I may do and ought not to do ; Nora never feels shy about anything.”

“ What can we do ? ” asked Miss Dixon despairingly.

“ If *you* can’t make her obey you, I am sure *I* can’t,” Catherine answered impatiently, tapping her foot on the floor. “ I should not care what she did, but that I think it hard she should disgrace us. I should not be surprised if every one gave up visiting us. And pray, what man of position would marry a girl with a sister like Nora ? ”

“ My dear, with your face and figure,” began Miss Dixon, expostulatively.

Catherine cut her short.

“ Oh yes, I know I’m good looking ; but

that's not everything. Men amuse themselves with good-looking girls, but they marry those that are well connected. I don't care for men only to admire me and flirt with me, I'm not such a fool. I mean to have a proper position in the county."

"So you shall, dear."

"So I shall, with such a sister as Nora! We shall see."

"What can I do?"

"Can't we send Nora away somewhere? Have you no relation or friend she could live with?"

Miss Dixon shook her head.

"You see, I have the guardianship of her for two years more, and if I drive her away, she may afterwards demand the money which I might have spent on her during that time. No; it's better to keep her here."

"Well, if she is to stay you must keep her in more control."

"So I would, if I could."

"Make it so disagreeable for her that she will have to give in. It's only fair. All she does is done to annoy us."

"She is too old to be punished."

"There are different ways of punishing people. If Nora persists in doing everything to disgrace us, I must defend myself. It is so underhand of her to go off to the *Sunlight*, and make friends with Guy Clifford and Allan Moore in that sort of way. I believe her sprained ankle was all a pretence; she wanted to create a sensation."

"My dear," said Miss Dixon, with a slight wink, a gesture she indulged in when desirous of being very confidential, "Nora may spare herself the trouble. She is not an attractive girl."

Catherine was silent. Presently she got up, opened the piano and sang. She had a powerful voice without sweetness, yet it was a voice that forced you to listen to it, and that lingered in your memory long after the sound of it had ceased. Catherine's singing always took the tone of her thoughts, and whatever the subject of her song, the mind of the singer filled the music with the triumph of selfish joy, or the relentless ring of cruel anger.

She was thinking to-day that Nora had no right to be at The Dell, spoiling other lives. She had absorbed her father's love, she had



kept aloof from every one after his death, she gave herself airs of goodness and cleverness. All this Catherine thought of as she sang. She could have tolerated Nora if she had entered into competition with her—had tried to look prettier, to dress better; but this shrinking from the amusements of others, this assumption of simplicity and love of reading was part of a plan to exalt herself and lower her sister and aunt. Often she had detected a smile on Nora's lips at some remark of Miss Dixon's, when, perhaps, the latter confused some writer's name, or alluded to a subject which she did not quite understand. Worse than all Nora's unpleasant ways, was her habit of dragging into needless prominence the fact that her mother had been a milliner. What was it done for, except to annoy those who looked on the connection as a disgrace? Of course Nora felt it so herself, and by this boasting of it thrust the unpleasantness on others.

Catherine's voice gained strength as she sang, even as her hatred to Nora grew as she thought of her. She could not sweep Nora out of her path, she could not destroy that fearless independence in her character, which seemed to

defy every one ; yet, as Catherine's voice rose and filled the room, pitiless in its tone, she felt with a thrill of joy the power to crush her enemies always.

Catherine loved to reign, and, like every tyrant, she nurtured a growing hatred to one from whom she could win no bow of allegiance, no acknowledgment of her dominion.

Catherine formed no plan to injure Nora, but she felt in active antagonism to her, and there would be no scruple in her soul when the time came for a sword thrust.

## CHAPTER XI.

### HOW LOVE GROWS.

NORA had only to nurse her hurt foot for a few days. It was soon well again, and the first day she could walk she was off to Wreck Cottage to her new friend.

Old Jos greeted her with a growl.

"Of course a woman can't stick to anything steadily," he said. "Four days absent, and yet you'll tell me you long to learn."

Nora laughed.

"Did you not know I had hurt my ankle and could not walk? I told Mr. Clifford to tell you."

"Well, he didn't. He is a scatter-brained lad, though a fine sailor."

"I have had the parson's son here to-day," he added; "he is doing Greek with me. He is in earnest, that young man; I fancy he will

always be, as long as he lives. He thinks he is going to be a parson of the right sort, and that he won't work in the old grooves. It's mighty fine, but when the profession is not entered from free choice, but to please his old fool of a father, I think it will be a failure. The Rev. Simeon is not much of an inspiration."

"Allan does not want to be a clergyman?" Nora asked, interested at once.

"He thinks he does; I know he doesn't."

"If a man chooses wrongly," she said, with eagerness, "does it not spoil his life? Is it not very hard afterwards?"

"Men and women who are blind must walk crookedly. A divided life is a miserable thing. By Jove, there's not so much in the best of us that we can afford to give but half to our truest aims. I was reading about old Michael Angelo last night," he added, stretching up his hand to a well-worn volume which was over the chimney shelf. "Good Lord, how that man threw himself into his work!"

Then he began to talk of him, and Nora to question; and, from the examination of his life, Thornton branched off to the lives of the great

Italians before and after him, and to the nature and government of the people amongst whom they lived, and in all old Thornton's words might be seen his deep reverence for the true and great. His judgment about art was weak on some sides, but his feeling was in the main right. He was much fascinated by the display of power, and thought Michael Angelo the greatest of artists. The tenderness and grace of some of the earlier painters did not touch him in the same way. From Thornton's own nature he could never be quite just to a soul that was refined and sensitive to a remarkable degree. It never struck Nora as strange, that old Jos should know so much on this and other subjects, nor that he should speak of Italy as if it were familiar to him. Although Thornton was living thus poorly and only assuming to be a net-maker and boat-builder, Nora knew that he was above ordinary men in thought. She had the rare gift of seeing men's souls.

"I like a man," said Thornton, "who hews his way through life, and is such a giant that the envious break themselves against his invulnerable strength."

"Is he not likely to take too conscious a pride in his power?" asked Nora timidly, venturing for the first time to oppose Thornton. "Of course there is a touch of weakness in being too sensitive, but——"

She hesitated and looked at Thornton.

"Say your say, lass; why should you not? Though you are young, you can think."

"I mean," she continued, "the sensitiveness draws you nearer to men, makes you understand their hearts, gives you an insight that——"

"Yes, it does; and leaves you at the mercy of every idiot who delights in drawing a comparison between you and himself. A great man with a thin skin is like St. Sebastian before long—a target for the arrows of the mob. The fools see a great man in their midst. 'Ha! ha!' say they, 'so this man is great, thinks his life more beautiful than ours; let's see. Does not this man get drunk in the morning? Does not this man swear at his servant? Is he not in love with his neighbour's wife? Is this great? Do we do this, we who are not thought great?' Then, perchance, the man of genius, who, if he's the right sort,

would have his life beautiful like his work, hears the cries of the fools, and, being sensitive and maybe weak, quivers. Then, by the Lord, his peace is gone! Tally ho! The mob are on him, and tear his daily life to shreds. 'This a man of genius! Why, he bites his nails! This a great man! Why, he wears a coat like a beggar! He's all wind and affectation.'

Nora laughed.

"Still," she said, more boldly, "I think the very, very greatest and best must be men who feel acutely, intensely, almost morbidly, and though their life be all pain they are nobler, somehow. Think of all the great, of——"

"There, there, child, I know what you are going to say. Think of Jesus, of Socrates, of Dante. Well, you are right, perhaps——"

"And, after all," she interrupted eagerly, "people understand at last, and in the end the greatness is recognized."

Thornton shook his head.

"The mob never understand; but when the poor worn-out body is dead and rotten, and they can't fling stones at it, and when the living work has gone over the earth like a wind, shaking men's minds out of sleep, then

the mob, in dire terror, lest they should be recognized for what they are—fools—begin to clap their hands, and say, ‘Ah, yes, of course, we always said he would be famous.’ Well, Miss Nora, I always like a man who is strong enough to snap his fingers at all that rubbish ; and the moment he does so, the cries of the fools die away to a whimper.”

“You like your hero to have a good deal of brutal strength?” Nora said, glancing at Thornton with a smile.

“Don’t pursue your advantage too far,” he answered, his old eyes twinkling. “I’ve given in quite enough. Presently you’ll prove me to have the mob’s vulgar admiration for a man who knocks them down ! Well, lass, I always did and always shall admire a genius with a good physical and moral biceps.”

“It seems so strange,” said Nora dreamily, leaning her elbow on the table, and shadowing her eyes with her hand, “that all men are not full of gladness when there is some great soul living amongst them. It makes the world beautiful at once, when there is something finer than oneself to look to and aspire to be like. Even to be with any one who thinks more and



knows more than I do, seems to expand my soul, seems to make life so different—oh, so different.”

Thornton could see her eyes flash in the shadow.

“People are not glad, they are angry.” Then, after a pause, he said suddenly, “It’s damned unlucky that you are a girl. When people treasure things and reverence things as you do, it’s well to be a man and make a fight for them, not to be a woman and be crushed while you cling to them.”

“Oh, I think,” said Nora airily, with a little toss of her head, “that I could make a good fight for anything I prize.”

“What do you know about it? It has not come to the battle yet. Women-folk cave in; men do too often, but they’ve more backbone.”

“I feel bristling with indignation, when you talk of women as if they were idiots.”

“They are not idiots, lass, but poor creatures—very poor creatures. Here’s my new pupil,” he added. “To think that I should turn schoolmaster at my age!”

Allan came in as Thornton spoke. Nora felt glad when she saw him. She watched him

shake hands with old Jos, and a sweet, eager look came in her eyes as he turned to her.

"Your poor ankle, is it well?" he asked; and from his manner it seemed important to him to know.

"It is well," she answered.

Allan turned to old Jos, and began to talk to him. Nora wanted to stay there. This seemed to her, life. Something was being done. Here were lives, not formless; they were tending to some end.

She looked wistfully at Thornton for a minute, then took courage and said—

"May I stay and do your netting? I shall be quite silent."

Jos glanced at her sharply.

"It's not pleasant at home, eh?"

"No."

"Then you had better stay, but for the life of you don't open your lips."

Nora took Thornton's netting and withdrew to the window. From time to time her hands dropped on her lap, and she watched the two men. She did not understand much of what they talked about. Thornton seemed inclined to contradict Allan always. Even when Allan

grew enthusiastic about *Æschylus*, whose tragedies they were reading, Thornton seemed impatient at his praise, as though it were poor and inadequate. As Nora sat there, she longed to separate her life as much as possible from such lives as Miss Dixon's and Catherine's, to stand alone, to work definitely and earnestly, but not insolently, to form her own standard of life and fight for it; and she resolved, with all the force of her will, never to accept, for the sake of quiet or expediency, the lower aims of minds she could not reverence. So thinking and sitting there, unnoticed by the two men, she felt a sudden, sad foresight that she was vowing herself to a life of pain, in which she might have so little cheer from the sympathy of others, that gradually resolution and effort might harden into severity, and the tender human heart, which was the chief element in her ideal of perfect life, be unknown, unrecognized.

At last Thornton shut the books.

"You'll go together, I suppose," he said; "and to-morrow you'll come again. I wonder, am I hindering or helping you both—one never knows.—"By the way," he said to Nora, as

she was bidding him good-bye, "about that boat? I've got a skiff that's light to pull. I think it will suit you. It won't cost much, and you can pay me by degrees. But, mind you, you must keep close to shore; there's a deal of dangerous rowing a little way out; and you are only a girl."

Nora laughed.

"You remind me pretty often of that; but I can scull as well as any lad, and I know the coast. You can trust me."

"Very well; we'll arrange about it to-morrow."

"Tell Mr. Moore," he added, "that it's no business of his, and he need not look so grave. I hate people that are wise beyond their years!"

"Why the devil, sir," he said to Allan, suddenly, "should not Miss Severne have a boat of her own, if she likes?"

Allan laughed heartily.

"I don't know of any reason, except that I should be very sorry if she were drowned; and boating alone sounds a dangerous pleasure. I suppose a man always feels a little bit nervous about a woman."

"That's the way; we make cowards of them, and then complain that they are helpless. Well, it does not matter. Good evening. The lass shall have her boat all the same."

They both laughed and went; and as Thornton closed the door after them, he muttered—

"Little she knows who got her the boat; but that's the way with all of them—they accept a thing, and never ask where it comes from, so long as it is something they want."

"Clifford is right," Allan said, as he walked with Nora. "Thornton is a fine old fellow. He does not like me: I want to overcome his prejudice against me."

"You are interested in the same things. If you had come a little sooner, you would have heard how enthusiastically he was talking of art."

"I don't think we should have agreed about that. I should probably hate Thornton if he talked of art, for the time at least." Allan smiled, as he said this. "Perhaps," he added, "the old man does not like me because I am going to be a parson. Church and state are his bogies!"

"Do you want to be a clergyman?" Nora asked quickly.

Allan did not answer for a minute; and Nora thought suddenly that she had known him for a very short time, and that she ought to have remembered this.

"Yes," he said at length, firmly and abruptly.

"I beg your pardon," said Nora. "Of course I ought not to have asked you—ought I?"

She looked up at him eagerly.

"It makes it ever so much harder to decide and be resolute, if I discuss things with every one."

"I did not ask in quite a stupid, inquisitive way; please don't think so. That evening on board the *Sunlight*, I felt as if I knew you and Mr. Clifford quite well all in a minute, and it was so nice to see other lives and understand all about other people; it was so lonely before."

Allan felt quite sorry for this girl, and was touched by her words.

"Was it?" he asked gently, taking Nora's hand. The firm, kind grasp filled her with delight.

"After all, Nora," he said, "I suppose we have known each other since we were children;

and I must have played with you when you were very small; but I remember your sister Catherine best. Not from any pleasant association," he added laughing; "but she used to sit in a pew near me in church, and I thought her such a wicked looking child. When I began to draw, all the wicked faces I made had a look of Catherine Severne!"

"I don't like her," said Nora, "more for what she is not, than what she is."

"Yet she looks positive enough in character; she has not a weak sort of face. I wonder whether the events of her life will ever make her as cruel as I am sure she has the power of being."

"I don't know. I often wish she would try to hurt me, rather than let her dislike smoulder in that stupid way."

They did not talk any more for a little while, and they were soon within sight of The Dell gateway.

"The beautiful and good faces you drew, who were they like?" asked Nora.

She wanted to know the kind of face which attracted him.

"In those early days? I think they were

faces I dreamed of, and never saw in life, but saw when I lay awake at night and thought, or when I read beautiful tales."

"And——" Nora began.

She was going to say, "And now?" but suddenly she could not say it. Why had she begun? Why had she stopped? A sudden fear, a sudden hope passed through her, and she felt afraid of herself. Who was this unfamiliar Nora, this girl in whom a hundred new thoughts and susceptibilities had sprung to life? She did not know her, could not trust her.

"Now," said Allan, "I'll say good-bye; I must go home."

He held out his hand.

"Good evening, Mr. Moore."

They both turned with a start, and saw Catherine standing behind them in the dusk. How long had she been there? Had she followed them? Had she heard their words? These questions flashed into Allan's and Nora's mind.

"Listeners hear no good of themselves," she said, with a little sharp laugh. "Does that apply in my case, do you think?"



They were both silent, not being as yet skilled enough in the world's ways to hide their confusion.

"Are you coming to our party next week, Mr. Moore?" Catherine continued. "Aunt and I thought that the neighbourhood wanted waking up."

"I am afraid——" Allan began.

"You won't come? No one can plead ~~any~~ previous engagements in this place. Well, we must do without you. You would not see Nora, of course. My dear sister does not appreciate social gatherings of the ordinary kind; she likes midnight excursions, rustic walks, etcetera. They are more sentimental, more suited to her romantic disposition." Catherine ran on, feeling glad that she was making both Allan and Nora uncomfortable. "You have no sympathy, I see, with my simple and very ordinary little gaieties, since you will not come on Wednesday. Perhaps you could persuade Nora to appear. The doctor's daughter is coming—the beautiful Miss Holt."

"Why should I worry your sister to appear, if she does not like parties?" Allan said

quickly. "If it is Wednesday you have fixed upon, I can go to you."

"You can bear Nora's absence?"

By this time Nora had quite recovered from her embarrassment.

"My non-appearance," she said with a smile, "is a mere question of clothes. I have no pretty dresses; and I feel awkward amongst other people. I suppose, if I gave myself a great deal of trouble, I could make myself a dress without running in debt, but there are so many things so much more interesting to do than to sew."

Allan looked at her.

"Is not your dress very nice?" he asked simply.

Catherine laughed.

"How prompt!" she said. "Are you already such an adept in flattery? I am so glad you are coming on Wednesday; every one will be delighted with you!"

Nora knew Allan had been sincere, and felt glad at his words. He shook hands with them now, and turned homewards.

The two girls went up the avenue together. Neither of them spoke for a few minutes, then

Nora said quietly, "I wonder why it is, Catherine, that you say things that hurt and tease me; I'd like to know."

Catherine laughed.  
"Would you really? I don't make a study of it; it would not be worth while."

"No, I suppose not; but as we shall probably live together for years, could we not manage to get on better? I know you don't like me. I suppose there is really nothing in our characters that agrees; but as I keep to myself and never interfere with you, you might be a little gentler, a little kinder in manner."

This was Nora's first distinct effort to put things on a pleasanter basis at home. The desire to beautify her life had suddenly grown strong in her; the desire to make her home relations not too great a contrast to her thoughts and to her life away from The Dell. Everything had changed to Nora. She might in the future be bitterly, actively opposed to Miss Dixon, or roused to passionate anger by Catherine, but she could never again live on as she had done hitherto—in mere dull antagonism to these two women, forming life of her own, and exhausting her force

a continuous contempt for vulgar, purposeless lives, a contempt which might have grown in time into a baseless self-exaltation.

“You don’t interfere with me!” exclaimed Catherine. “How hypocritical you are, Nora. You behave as a girl, who is a lady, could never behave, and you delight in bringing discredit on us. Oh, don’t make me go through the list of things you do,” she added, as she saw that Nora was going to speak. “You know as well as I do that your ways are contrary to all custom, and are either mad or improper.”

Nora could not help smiling.

“And if,” she said, “you found pleasure in the same things as I do, would you give them all up because other people did not like them?”

“I could never be so conceited, or such a fool, as to try and uphold my notions against the opinions of the world. You, I suppose, think yourself a most remarkable person, a genius to whom ordinary rules do not apply. Perhaps you are, but if I and Aunt Barbara do not recognize your extraordinary talents, you can’t expect us to be delighted with your peculiar ways.”

Nora looked at Catherine. Was there nothing in her that was soft, girlish, natural? Her lips were thin and cruel, her eyes hard and cold, but she was young, her skin was clear and soft, the form of her face had no unpleasant indications; surely somewhere tenderness lurked in her soul, comradeship and kindness. Nora made another effort.

"There is nothing wrong or hurtful in my improper ways," she answered smiling; "and so I know that, in the end, they can't really do you or me or any one harm."

"Who is going to give you credit for your pure and beautiful intentions? I think you had better carry an advertisement on your back, to say that everything you do is from the very best motives; and then, do you think, it would be believed?"

Catherine's laugh rang through the still air. Nora's eyes rested on the ground. She did not wish to be roused to hasty retort. She still thought it possible to approach Catherine on some side which was not stony.

"But, Catherine," she said gently, "don't you think that the love or friendship or respect you might lose through my doings, would not

be worth keeping? You are not me; and it is better to be liked for yourself than your surroundings."

"I like respect and friendship, however it comes. Thank God I am not you; but it is quite natural that the low tastes and stupid, improper ways of my sister should reflect upon me, and prevent people from trying to be my friends, and should cut me off from the society and position which I have a right to."

Nora did not speak for a minute. She was angry and impatient at last.

"I've done my best to explain," she said firmly, "and since you can't understand we will not talk of it any more. I must live my own life. There is no love between us, no sympathy. I cannot yield to you, or try to win people by always worrying myself about what they may say. Why should I try to please the society of Cairn Cove? I'll only try to please those, and be like those I think wiser and better than myself."

Nora's face flushed, and she spoke excitedly.

"And being clearly above us, you will not stoop to our prejudices? Very well, please yourself, dear" (here Catherine laughed); "but

I warn you if you get into any mischief I'll be the first to show you up. If you cross my plans and try to spoil my life, I'll have no pity for you. I can be as unbending as you are. Why, pray, should your purposes be better than mine, or anything more be sacrificed for you than for me? It may be a want of intelligence—I am not so clever as you—but I cannot see what makes your mode of life more admirable than mine. We are not sisterly, that's plain. All's fair in love and war. You won't have it love, so let it be war."

She laughed again as she entered the house; and a few minutes later Nora heard her singing. Her voice had never sounded so cruel—it was an exultant song. Catherine's cruelty would never be impotent.

Nora shut the door of her room, and tried not to hear Catherine's voice; she even put her hands on her ears. She wished to dwell on that was growing sweet and delightful in her life.

The evening shadows had come down on trees and fields, the air was still and dreamy, full of the mystery of coming night, and all the attendants of the spirit came to lure Nora's

soul into paths of delight. Knowledge, friendship, love, came with smiling faces ; and she gave herself to them humbly, craving for their eternal presence, and in the least trustworthy she placed the most faith. How could she think that he would not walk ever by her side, when the first glimpse of his beautiful face had lighted her path like a sunbeam, and made her see a new glory in the sky, a new beauty in the earth. She bowed reverently at love's feet, and vowed herself unconsciously to his service, and so doing, poor child, she vowed herself to a life of pain, because of the soul that was in her.



## CHAPTER XII.

### A FAIR FACE.

NORA's power of discovering beauty in life, in nature, in expression, was keenly delicate, and so continuously exercised that it placed her out of the reach of the commonplace, and made her soul's life poetic and unusual. Sometimes, sitting in the fading light in the drawing-room at The Dell, Nora's eyes would rest on Catherine, who, perhaps, was standing silent, her head slightly averted, and even in that face, which was so unsympathetic to her, Nora would find some beauty—would notice the smooth, warm skin, its over-colouring softened by the evening light, and would recognize the attractiveness of its animal comeliness. A face to handle and caress, not to look on reverently and longingly. Do we blame men that they fondle and forget? There are some faces which woo them to it.

Catherine's was one of these ; and Nora, looking at her on rare occasions like this, knew that it was so, knew it from the instinct which, in natures such as hers, supplies the place of knowledge, and understood, in an appreciative way, the desire to stretch out the hand and touch the smooth roundness of her cheek and neck. But when Catherine would turn, perhaps to make some remark, and the expression of her cunning eyes would rest on Nora, then the admiration of the latter ended, and often in an apparently unreasonable way she would get up and leave the room. Such a movement Catherine assigned to deliberate rudeness or insolence. How could she see the motive ?

Chiefly out on the moor or on the sea did Nora worship beauty most devoutly, and with least fear of jarring or mocking thoughts. It was intoxication to her to watch the wild course of the wind, the dash of the waves, or to bask in the voluptuous all-embracing sunshine. But she wanted more than this : she wanted to see beauty in men's and women's faces and lives ; she wanted some of her dreams to become real things ; she wanted to contemplate in others that exquisite growth and

development of beauty which she saw in nature and craved for in her own soul.

It was an event in Nora's life, the first day that she saw Evelyn Holt. It was a summer's evening, and Nora had been rowing herself lazily along the coast; looking into the green depths beneath her or the blue heights above, feeling—as she ever felt when alone on the water—that all nature was living, throbbing, answering to her thoughts, as no one in human form had ever done. She had come in to shore, had tucked up her coarse dress, sprung out into the surf, and pulled her light boat up on the sands. She did not notice till she had done so, that there were two figures very close to her. She guessed at once that they were Doctor Holt and his daughter. A tall man, with iron grey beard and moustache, was standing by the water's edge, and on his arm leaned a slender girl of about eighteen or nineteen. Nora turned and looked at her, and after the first glance continued to look at her. Nora had never seen a very pretty woman before, and her eyes wandered all over her face and figure with delight.

Evelyn Holt looked frail, but her figure had

no painful appearance of attenuation, it was perfectly round. One could note the soft curves of her form through her slight summer dress. Her complexion was extraordinarily transparent. She had an oval face very delicate in outline, and eyes that were dreamy and lustrous. Her mouth was faulty. Nora saw this at once, but scarcely knew what was amiss. Was the fault in form or expression, or in both? Nora was not sure; but her eyes unconsciously returned to the other features, which were more admirable. Nora noted every detail of Evelyn's dress, and listened to the sound of her voice, which was soft and languid. Suddenly she felt in the presence of a woman exquisitely feminine, a woman whose very weakness was fascinating; and, looking at her, Nora felt herself a waif, barred alike from the strength of man and the grace and beauty of woman. For the first time her worship of the beautiful was associated with pain.

"How pretty it all looks!" Evelyn was saying to her father. "I think I shall get quite strong here."

"I hope so," Doctor Holt answered, "if you will be but commonly prudent; but even this

warm evening you are too lightly clad—your shoes are too slight. How can you be so foolish, when you know how anxious you make me ?”

Evelyn laughed.

“You would have me dress like the fisherwomen, with great clumping shoes, and a gown so rough that it would rasp my fingers if I touched it. Cruel papa !”

Doctor Holt did not seem to listen to what she said. Presently Evelyn clasped both her hands on her father’s arm, and said—

“Let us go home.”

As they turned away, she added, in a lower tone—

“It gives me the horrors to see that girl stand there in that motionless way. Is she a ghost or a fisherman’s daughter, or what is she ?”

As she spoke she shivered slightly and looked over her shoulder at Nora. The latter watched them disappear, then called one of the lads who were throwing stones at the sea birds ; and, with his help, she pulled up her boat high and dry, then she turned homewards.

Nora had always mocked at women giving

thought to dress, had sniffed most scornfully at Catherine's adornments. People were not pretty if they needed this; the beauty could not be true if heightened by a lace or a ribbon. But, seeing Evelyn Holt, Nora thought differently. It seemed quite right that her dress should be costly and delicate.

Thinking, as she walked home in the dusk, of Evelyn's soft, young face, there stole into Nora's heart the first thought of man's love, the first mysterious throb of unconscious passion, the first mental stretch towards an unknown joy.

How beautiful life might be for a girl like Miss Holt. She was so in harmony with every thing lovely, that it seemed as if fate must deal kindly with her.

Nora passed through the village. It was a warm evening, and some of the women were sitting at their door-sills, some of the fishermen lolling against the walls of their cottages smoking, and the children playing at hide and seek, and filling the air with their screams and laughter. Nora stopped and looked at them.

She had no one to play with. Why was she

so unlucky ? A little boy, hotly pursued, took refuge behind Nora's skirts. She smiled, took him by the hand, and hid him behind an open door. In five minutes she was full swing in their games. There is no respect of persons with children ; any one who will play is their equal at once.

Nora had snatched up a very tiny, dirty child, and was giving him a triumphant ride on her shoulder, when Miss Dixon, Catherine, and Squire Armfield came by. The small child, finding itself in an unusually lofty position, had clutched the top of Nora's hat ; but that being an unsatisfactory support, had knocked the hat off and plunged its little hand into the midst of Nora's curls.

" You know that hurts me, little one," Nora was saying. " Let go my hair ; you are quite safe. I would not let you fall for the world."

Confidence being instantly inspired, the child had relaxed its hold and begun clapping its hands joyously. It was at this moment that Nora's relations saw her.

Catherine nudged her aunt, wishing to convey to her that it was best not to acknowledge Nora, but to pass by at a little distance.

It was dusk, and the squire was not likely to see who it was; and Catherine did not feel inclined to recognize her step-sister under such circumstances; but Miss Dixon never took hints, and her indignation found vent in a protesting and reproachful "Nora!"

The misdemeanant looked at them for a moment, noticed that Catherine had on her best dress, was looking her sweetest at the squire, was also slightly mincing her words and walking with her most ladylike step, so the devil that lurked in the corner of Nora's lips instantly showed itself. She stepped up to Catherine, still bearing aloft the delighted infant. She made a sort of curtsy, and said with a smile—

"Won't you join us? Any volunteers for the service will be gladly enrolled."

Catherine looked at her as if startled by a sudden apparition.

"Thank you," she said pompously, "we have not got the same tastes."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Armfield. "Very picturesque, upon my soul—a study for an artist."

His heavy eyelids closed a little more over his eyes, so that the latter almost disappeared,



and his thick formless lips twitched slightly ; this was his facial expression of merriment.

Nora turned and looked at him with contemptuous glance, more expressive than words.

"Let us go on," Catherine said to him. "No doubt Miss Nora Severne will come home when she is tired of her refined amusement."

Then she shrugged her shoulders and glanced at Nora in a manner meant to convey that the girl, who was unfortunately her step-sister, was very eccentric, if not mad. Miss Dixon lingered a little behind the others when they moved on, and caught Nora by the arm.

"How can you disgrace us in this way," she said angrily. "What must the squire think of you ! For your sister's sake, you ought to have some respect for appearances and restrain your low tastes !"

The scornful smile seemed fixed on Nora's lips now, and made Miss Dixon feel that her words were very useless.

"I've no patience with you," she added more angrily. "Your intolerable selfishness makes you perfectly careless of other people's feelings ; and when I speak to you I make

more impression than if I were speaking to a fool."

The little one perched on Nora's shoulder began to feel scolded, stuck its finger in its mouth, and gave a dismal howl.

"You are frightening the child," Nora said quickly. Then, looking up at it, she added, "We are not naughty, dear; this lady makes a mistake. We must go our way, and she must go hers."

Still, with that peculiar expression on her lips, she said—

"Good evening, Miss Dixon. We arranged long ago not to interfere with one another."

Miss Dixon muttered something, but felt herself dismissed, and hurried on to join her respectable niece.

For a few minutes Nora devoted herself to consoling her playfellow, then took it to its mother, bade them good evening, and turned, not homewards, but back to the beach. The look of contempt faded out of her face. She belonged to all this sweet earth, and not to people such as those she lived with. As to her selfishness, perhaps she was selfish, but hearing it from Miss Dixon's lips by no means con-

vinced her that she was so. Hard, was she hard? Girls cried if people spoke roughly to them; they cried if they were disappointed — they cried in church, because the parson said something in a sing-song voice, which they found pathetic, though the words were poor and insignificant. Was it “hard” not to be emotional about such things, but to be more inclined to laugh? If so, she was indeed heartless. But she was not hard when she was by the wild sea, thinking of those who had sunk in its green depths, listening to its roar, which answered to the howl of the winds. Their wrath was not like human wrath—mean, impotent, spiteful. If the elements were cruel, theirs was the grand tragic cruelty of fate, because the gods would have it so, and over the hearts they broke they wailed in pity. A still summer’s evening, such as this, the sky reddened by the setting sun, seemed to be aglow with tenderness. The light lingered to let the happy children play, to lend music to the kiss of lovers, to bring peace to the hearts of the old. All these thoughts not fill her with ladylike emotion at other times, but they would do well enough for

Nora sat down on a big rock and went on dreaming. How would a girl like Evelyn Holt think about these things? The beauty of her face haunted Nora. What a sense of rest it must give not to be a contradiction; to be a woman and look feminine; to be gentle and pretty, and have a mind that bends, and a manner that caresses. As to herself, she was a contradiction. She looked like a boy, she was not gentle, she could not yield unreasoningly, but must mould her own life.

Why should not men and women act out their thoughts and nature in their life, so long as the action is not hurtful to others? When it is so, they must be restrained by man, as the winds and waves are restrained, when they would wreck and destroy. The human soul is nobler than irreflective nature, in so far as it freely exercises self-restraint; is poorer than the elements, in so far as it will not boldly follow the leadings of its destiny, will not boldly carry out the scheme of its creator.

Well, Nora thought, she must not hanker after a life such as would suit a girl like Evelyn; she must have manly strength. The strong could be kind, because they had power.

She would be strong; she was so now—physically strong, for she could row, and run, and was quite fearless; mentally strong, for she never found herself balancing between courses of action. Possibly this decision of purpose might be the decision of ignorance. Nora smiled. Well, she wanted to know more. Old Thornton would teach her. She did not know how to make any one like her. Perhaps he would weary of her soon, and not be much help to her. She *must* learn. She seemed alone in the big world, alone in the social world, but not in the world of thought; there she had many friends, but she could know them and love them better, if some one, more in their confidence than she was, would interpret their thoughts to her. Perhaps they would not dain to unfold themselves entirely to an ignorant girl. She would haunt old Jos. If he were cross, she would not care; if he told her to go away, she would not care. She could read in his face many things that interested her. She wanted to be good friends with him. Why were people so dull that they could not read faces and know the natures of those they lived with? All were too full of

themselves, thinking of the impressions they created, and not noticing the souls of others. If it were not for this, it would be easy to learn. Every little action, habit, word, trick of manner or motion was the history of the soul, printed in the clearest type, and all the thoughts day by day moulded the face; the oftener their recurrence the deeper the lines that they marked.

Then all the people Nora knew seemed to range themselves before her; and she judged them with all the intolerance of youth and all the enthusiasm of ignorance.

Natures like Nora's are bound from their birth to a life of pain—bound by the ceaseless aspiration of the soul, which makes self-contentment impossible; bound by a sensitive tenderness which never meets a satisfying response; bound by a clinging constancy of mind which never loses hold of its ideal, though outward action may seem to deface it; bound by a certain purity of thought, which even debauch cannot defile. In the soul of every man and woman born into the world is the germ of their history, of their true life, and it will grow in defiance of fate and fortune.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## UNEQUAL HEARTS.

ALLAN'S puzzled thoughts respecting Evelyn Holt had become very definite in the weeks which had elapsed, since his admiration of her had been jestingly alluded to by Guy Clifford. Day by day, Allan thought Evelyn more lovely, and he invested her, in his romantic dreams, with a thousand graces of mind ; nor was this investiture a great imaginative effort, for Evelyn had all the delicate beauty of face and form which could best attract a mind of Allan's dreamy refinement.

Evelyn Holt was a sweet, fragile-looking girl, who reclined much in easy chairs and on sofas, and, looking as though it were fitting she should so do, was unsuspected of affectation, save by her schoolboy brothers. She quickly discovered that Allan Moore loved her. She

was skilled in the detection of the first tokens of affection, and she experienced in their discovery a delight quite sufficing to her soul. Sitting by her side and looking on her fair face, Allan felt his heart stirred within him. Evelyn seemed the embodiment of all spiritual beauty. He felt in dreamland ; and this possibility, that this beautiful girl might one day lift her eyes to his with a look of love, made his whole being thrill with delight and pain. There was no slow growth of affection in his heart ; a little worship of her beauty at a distance, and then a flood of passionate love swept over him and enslaved him. He brought her flowers, he brought her books, he talked enthusiastically of art, of literature, of all that he loved in the world of thought. She listened and looked beautiful. Sometimes she skimmed through the books and fancied she understood and liked them. She would have fancied she understood and liked a treatise on small-pox, if it were recommended to her by a lover.

“ I wish I could read as much as you do,” she said, one day, when Allan eagerly asked her opinion of a book which had fired his imagination, a book which he at once lent to



Evelyn, "but I get so easily tired, and my head aches if I read for long."

Under the sofa pillow lay a French novel, which had solaced her throughout the day.

"I am so sorry," he answered, "that it tires you to read. You must have many lonely hours."

"Yes, is it not a pity? for reading makes one think, makes one live in a beautiful world."

Allan looked delightedly at this frail girl, in whose fair form seemed to dwell so fair a mind.

"I should like to know great men," Evelyn went on; "to hear them talk, to look in their faces and be their friend. Would it not be nice? But I suppose I could never be their friend," she added deprecatingly, "for I know so little."

"An intelligent woman has a sort of knowledge which is better than actual learning. At least," Allan added, "I fancy so, but I know very little about women. I always think they have very swift minds; they seem to understand things."

Evelyn laughed. She had a pretty laugh.

"It must be delightful to feel that one is an inspiration to a clever man, to cherish his best thoughts, and urge him on in his career."

Allan's eyes glowed. "What a noble nature she had," he reflected.

"And to see," she went on, "that at last he wins a position for himself, and is great in the world's eyes."

Allan's face changed. He was somewhat disappointed at Evelyn's conception of the goal for a great man.

"I don't think it much matters about that. Some of our greatest men had not much of a position, you must remember."

"No," said Evelyn quickly, detecting her mistake and proceeding to explain what she at once recognized she had meant. "No, of course, it does not matter at all to the great man ; but those who love him would wish the world to acknowledge his greatness and reward him. Would they not?"

"They ought not to care much about the world's acknowledgment."

"Am I very worldly and ambitious?" she asked, looking at him appealingly, as if she feared his judgment.

"You are only ambitious for others," he said rapturously, so rapturously that Evelyn blushed and began talking at once.

"I wish I could not only read and appreciate things, but do something myself."

He longed to tell her that to look as beautiful as she did was gift enough to the world, but he checked himself. He must not say these things, it would be an impertinence, and would hurt a nature as sensitive as hers.

"I am sure you can do many things," he said vaguely.

"I cannot draw, or write, or do any of the clever things that you find easy and delightful ; but people must accept their natures and not crave for impossible powers."

All this would have brought a smile to Clifford's face, but from the earnestness of Allan's nature the weak babbling of this girl seemed sincere and poetical.

"I don't find any easy," he said ; "but I think striving, whatever pain it brings, and it brings much, always expands life and makes it broader, finer."

He stopped and coloured deeply.

"I sound as if I were talking very pompously, but I don't mean to, really."

"Do you not think," she said, with a little movement of the head and a smiling glance, "that I am intelligent enough to know what you mean, and not to make mistakes about you?"

Allan did not reply, but looked at her eloquently.

"Go on talking pompously," she said, "I like it. I can't strive much, I'm such a poor, weak creature; but I like to hear about others. It must be delightful to conquer."

"Yes, but we gain such little victories; at least, I do. But if we never won a mental battle at all, yet the struggle is good, it makes us understand. You understand all literature so much better when you have tried to form your own thoughts into words; you understand all art so much better when you have worked honestly with brush or chisel; this I am sure of."

"And for those who can never produce anything, can only read and study and love things, must they always be outside in darkness?"

"I think women, intelligent women, with their wonderful sympathy for what is good and great, are gifted with an understanding for which men must labour for years. I don't know much about it, but I think so."

Evelyn was silent for a few minutes. She had quite forgotten her interest in the unhealthy French novel under the sofa pillow; she was thoroughly enjoying this visit of Allan Moore's. Cairn Cove had become an interesting place to her. Here was this handsome man, with wistful eyes, talking to her eagerly, listening eagerly for her words. They had passed into the exquisite borderland between friendship and love; the future seemed full of delightful possibilities, and she felt a thrill of conscious power, which made life full of mysterious romance.

Suddenly the door opened a little, and a schoolboy voice rang through the room.

"I say, Evelyn, Bob and I have found the very thing for your complexion, much better than oaten meal and butter-milk."

Evelyn blushed and bit her lips. She hated ridicule. She was so angry at this rough schoolboy "chaff" that she almost lost control

for herself; but in a second she checked the words that came to her lips.

"Harry," she called out, "just come here for a moment."

"You want to hear the recipe; you shall on any condition."

He entered the room as he spoke, and started when he saw Allan.

"Harry," Evelyn said quietly, "this is Mr. Moore. If you wish him to hear your stupid jokes, you had better come in, and say them before him."

She smiled a little, and looked superior.

"Oh, I say," thought Harry, "there's dignity for you!" But being a schoolboy he was not much impressed.

"Yes, by Jove! he might like to know how the effect is produced," said the unabashed Harry; "but I'll tell him in private."

This distressing brother then rushed from the room, banging the door after him.

Allan was amused. It never occurred to him that Evelyn could be annoyed by such nonsense.

"I should think that lad must be great fun," he said. "What a bright face he has!"

Evelyn was disappointed. She had expected Allan to be indignant at Harry's rudeness to her.

"They are all dear boys," she said ; "but they are so dreadfully noisy, and make my poor head ache."

She put up her hand pathetically to her brow.

"Oh, they should not be allowed to do that," he said quickly.

Allan sat silent for a few minutes, looking at Evelyn. How lovely she seemed to him ! Her weakness, her delicacy only made her beauty more attractive. It was not the sort of thing to do—to sit staring at her—yet how could he help it ? Love had taken possession of him. Perhaps not to-day or to-morrow, perhaps not in his lifetime should he say how he loved her, none the less was his poetic soul filled with the thought of her ; and as she looked in his eyes and smiled, he knew that out of his world she could never go.

She leaned upon her elbow, and began talking again.

"I want to see your pictures some day—may I ?"

"Yes."

"Will you teach me a little? I should like to much to draw," she said enthusiastically.

Of course I could never do anything worth looking at, but it would be so delightful to draw flowers and pretty things for my own pleasure."

"I should like to teach you."

"Do you want to be an artist?"

Allan smiled.

"I don't think you could guess how much I desire it."

"You want to paint well for pleasure, but not to make painting your profession?"

"I should like to make it my profession; but there is not much hope of my doing so."

"Are not painters dreadfully poor, and have they not to struggle in wretchedness for ever so long; and don't they very often die without any one finding out how clever they are?"

"Yes; sometimes all that happens. But a real artist does not care; he will bear anything for art's sake."

"Yes, they think that when they have everything they want; but afterwards, when



they are miserable, I dare say they change their opinion, but are too proud to acknowledge it. I don't mind doing without luxury, but being quite poor always seems ugly. How could you think of a beautiful picture in a dirty room, with nasty old broken-down furniture?"

"I should not look at the room nor the furniture."

"I don't believe you," she said playfully.

"Don't you? If one thought absorbs you very, very much, you notice nothing else. When I am sitting here, looking at you, I have not the least idea what else is in the room."

Evelyn blushed.

"I beg your pardon," he added quickly; "I meant it quite simply and sincerely. It always seems foolish not to say things."

"You are not like any one else I ever met," she said softly, looking down, and toying with her lace handkerchief.

It seemed impossible to keep back the words that came to his lips. He did not expect her to say that she loved him; but what did that matter? How could he sit here, close

to her, almost touching her arm, almost feeling her breath on his face, his eyes resting on her delicate loveliness, and not speak his thoughts ? He bent towards her, his dark eyes glowed with an expression which made her glance fall, and his voice took the tone which never comes save when the whole being vibrates with passionate love.

“I want to tell you,” he said, “how beautiful I think you. It does not hurt you, does it, that I should say this ? I feel your presence as I never felt the presence of any human being. I can’t help telling you. I could not come and see you without your knowing this. You may tell me not to come, you may treat me merely as a friend, as anything, it will make no difference ; I shall be ready at any time to do anything for you—to give my life for you, if need be.”

He rose as he spoke, and stood away from her. It was an unconscious movement, as if asking no sign of love ; it lent dignity to his words.

“It is very soon for you to feel all this,” she said gently, after a silence of a minute or two. “I am surprised, but I’m not angry.

Indeed, I will not tell you not to come. I will not throw away your—your—friendship. Come as often as you like, and tell me about your pictures, and your life, and everything. I shall like to see you ; and I feel as if—as if—I could not quite do without seeing you now.”

Allan took a step forward. He wanted to take her in his arms, to hold her to his heart, to tell her a thousand times that he loved her, that he felt transformed by this love. Why should she be less sure of her feelings than he was of his? Kindred natures did not need years of fellowship to bind them ; they rushed together at a glance. Exalted love had a higher wisdom than that gained by caution and experience.

It was no mere form of speech, this which Allan had said, that he would give his life for Evelyn. He had no life now, but the life she gave him. Round her would circle all his hopes, all possible joy. Into the present moment was poured the dream of youth, the throb of aspiration, the ardour of manhood, and the glory of imagination, and with all not a touch of false feeling, nor the faintest consciousness of a criticism outside his and her heart.

Evelyn appreciated his fervour in a way such foolish, single-hearted worship often is appreciated. She thought it quite touching to see him so mad about her; and, though she was not much in love with him, she felt she must be kind to him. It would be needless cruelty to send him away, and say she did not love him; besides, she did not know; perhaps she did love him.

Such weak doubt was impossible to Allan. Evelyn's silence could only mean that she loved him. He stooped to her suddenly, knelt down beside her, put his arms round her, drew her head on his shoulder, and kissed her, while he murmured a hundred fond words. She, poor puny soul, was frightened by his earnestness. There was no response in her to the strong reality of his passion; there never could be any response in her to any strong reality. She drew herself away from him, begged of him to let her free.

"You should not," she said, smoothing her ruffled lace.

"I like you very much, but I'm so young, and I'm not strong; and please, Allan, don't." She ended by a little smile and a white

hand held out delicately, and there were tears in her large eyes.

"I was rough to you," he said; "forgive me, darling. You don't understand yet how my love has mastered me."

After one instant's disappointment at Evelyn's reception of his love, he thought it sweet and delicate and feminine that she should timidly shrink from him.

Evelyn laid her hand on Allan's shoulder, and began to talk softly to him, he still kneeling beside her, and she was quite conscious that her *pose* was graceful and tender.

"So you love me very much?" she said. "But you do not want me to be engaged to you; you don't want to bind me by promises, do you? I am quite young. You scarcely know me, and I scarcely know you."

"I would bind you by a thousand promises, if I could," he answered passionately. "Why should I not? I am sure, no man can ever love you better than I do. Of course I'm young; but for many years my life has been quite alone, and my thoughts have taught me. I know there is but one thing in the world worth having, and that is love. What does it

matter about anything else ? And I want you to feel this. Why should we conceal that we love one another ? We belong to each other, now and always ; don't we, darling—don't we ?”

Evelyn was moved by his earnestness. It would be delightful to have so devoted a lover, but doubly delightful if their love were kept a secret.

“ Yes, I think so,” she said quietly ; “ but I don't want every one to know, and papa would be angry, and that would make me ill, and we can be much happier if no one makes remarks. It spoils everything if people talk and worry. Don't you think so, Allan ?”

Then her eyes looked at him with such tenderness that all his theories were swept away, all his wishes given up to hers.

“ I'll do as you wish ; all I want is your love. You do not love me enough yet ; but you will, you will. How beautiful you are, Evelyn ! You must take care of yourself. I must guard you ; every one must guard you ; you are too frail, too lovely for this world.”

There was a step in the hall. Allan sprang to his feet. A moment later Dr. Holt entered. Allan would have liked to speak to him then,

to have told him simply all that was in his heart. He felt sure such love as his could conquer her father, but Evelyn had wished him to be silent ; and he was obedient. He had taken the first step into voluntary slavery.

Delusions are one of the delights of life. Why should we wring our hands over them ? The purer, the nobler the mind, the more truly can it live in a delusion. Well, the dream is exquisite, even though an awakening must come.

Allan walked to his studio, and worked all the evening with a new-found joy, with a new thrill of inspiration, with a strong belief in his power to create beauty, and with an endless world of love and art stretching out before him.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A DAY TO REMEMBER.

THE hours passed at Wreck Cottage were hours of delight to Nora. She was in earnest about learning, and unceasing in her demands on Thornton's knowledge. Nora did not always see Allan Moore at Wreck Cottage; he did not come every day, he sometimes came after she had gone home. The days on which they did not meet were, to Nora, days without sunshine; not black, useless days, but a cloud of disappointment darkened them a little. She was not irreflective enough to misunderstand her own feelings. When Allan came in, bending his head a little as he passed through the low doorway, the glow of delight which Nora felt, she was too simple to misinterpret. Oh, she was glad! Every day she seemed to be gladder. Sometimes she sat in the window



while Allan was reading, and her eyes rested on his delicate face, finding ever new beauty in it. The low straight brow, and sweet eyes, the lines of the mouth, so full of tenderness, the power of expression, which could so quickly change from winning gentleness to defiant scorn—all this Nora grew familiar with, and loved. Yet she made no effort to attract him, or to win his notice in any way. Only when he sometimes looked up, and his glance met hers, her lips were parted with a faint smile, and her whole face seemed glorified.

When Nora had not been present during Allan's hours of study at Wreck Cottage, old Jos generally retailed to her most of the conversation that had passed—the arguments between himself and Allan, and the views expressed by the latter—so that Nora grew familiar with Allan's thoughts, began to know the scope of his reading, his aims and hopes, for Thornton had the rare gift of making a man speak his true thought.

“I begin to like the lad better,” old Jos said to Nora one day. “He understands everything so quickly ; he has a mind as swift as the wind ; but what beats me is that he

should want to be a parson. I'd like to knock that notion out of him."

"He will go into the Church to please his father, I suppose," said Nora.

"His intelligence ought to prevent his being biassed by the Rev. Simeon. I can't tell the lad that his father is a damned fool; but he ought to find it out—he will, too, in time, unless some other motive makes him take Orders, then he'll be done for."

"What else could influence him?"

"Many things; want of money, and a nice fat living in prospect; or perchance he'll fall in love with some silly woman, who'll desire to see him figuring in the pulpit?"

"What woman?" Nora asked quickly, without pausing to think how absurd was the question.

"Lord! how can I tell what woman Allan Moore has met, or may meet! I fancy the lad would give his soul to any one he loved."

"And so he ought. There can be no half thought, no drawing back, when——"

A slight twinkle in old Jos's eyes silenced Nora.

"Well?"

Then suddenly his face grew grave.

"Of course, of course," he said; "it's always so, but wait awhile. All's well when the woman is worthy; but when she's not?"

"Then he finds it out at once, or very soon."

"Not always, not often. But don't you trouble your head about it; but mind you, lass, you must never block up a man's path, and prevent him seeing clearly."

"Is it not women who are oftenest influenced, who give up their own views and principles?"

"Yes; but it does not much matter, does it? Their principles are mostly so unfounded and undefined that they never notice that they've given them up."

"Poor things!" said Nora, laughing.

"I don't fancy that you are one of those," said old Jos, looking at her keenly. "So much the harder time you'll have of it. I wonder what you'll make of it all, and when you are my age what you'll think."

Thornton was in a very rambling mood to-day. He had laid down the book they had been reading. Old memories were astir in his mind, and thoughts about the future of those who would be still young when he was dead.

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He began to feel a warmth in his heart in the presence of this girl. With the entrance of Nora was blown into his cottage the scent of the jessamine which grew on the house of his childhood, and the dim picture of beauty and sweetness, which for long years had been associated with the step, the voice, the smile of a woman.

Nora, seeing that the books were closed for the day, took the netting and worked. Thornton was silent for a while, then spoke out the thoughts that came—

“After all, one can’t guide people. You must judge for yourself always. It all depends on how you see things, child. If step by step the path clears out before you, and you walk on, I don’t know what you want to look for another road for.”

“But if we all see so differently, it’s not the same sort of world to us, and we are all very far off from one another.”

“Not so far as we think ; we are such fools ! I suppose the parson thinks me a damned long way off from him, because I don’t go to church ; and yet if I were to sit and listen to his twaddle, I’d be a deal further off from him

that I am now. You see, if I don't hear him talk, I can fancy he is a bit longer-sighted than he is."

"Tell me what you mean ; though I think I know."

Nora looked up at the old man eagerly for an instant, then went on with her work more rapidly.

"Of course, you know ; it's this—just what you see with your eyes, makes your body's world ; just what you see rightly through and through with your mind, makes your soul's world. And when they come talking to me about churches and creeds, and you must do this, and you must do that, and you must feel this, and you must feel the other, I just smile a bit, and they think me a heathen. They turn themselves inside out, and keep searching for true faith, and cringe, and howl, and think it's a prayerful spirit, and writhe and wriggle in mental agonies. Well, I say, the path's blocked up, and they can't see, and I don't much mind if it amuses them ; they are good enough, only they are as blind as bats. They can't see that the Lord is in the wind that blows in at the window there"—he pointed to

the lattice, which stood open, through which the sweet air passed, making the autumn roses bow their heads and look in—"in the wee birdies which are singing on the trees, in the thought which makes this nook sweeter to me than a king's palace. They can't see the divinity that's in you and me and everything in the wide world, unless it puts on a certain dress. Didn't I say they were blind as bats? They think I'm blasphemous, because I don't go clasping my hands, and turning up my eyes; that I've no reverence in me, because I think that God Almighty is always with me, and that I don't need to cringe to Him."

The old man stopped speaking; and Nora let her hands fall idly on her lap for a few moments. She had thought of all this so often. •

"Well," he continued, "let every one go as far as they see, and I don't want to cross them. There are two things which make us differ: there is each man's mind, and each man's life. For instance, how the mischief can the parson and I understand each other? He has been brought up in a corner, and began to teach before he had learnt—there's nothing like talking for making you blind when you

are young ; while I've knocked about the world, heard men seem to revile in one land what they seem to worship in another—mind you, I say *seem* ; you know what I mean—and have just found the Lord in the souls of men everywhere ; and here am I, a heathen to the parson, but not afraid of death anyhow, and a bit anxious to know more about the other side.”

He was silent, and his fine old face grew sad.

Nora wanted him to speak on. She never joined much in such conversation. A little word now and then set his thoughts in motion, and he would speak.

“ You are patient with their blindness, even when they worry you ? Always tolerant ? ” she asked.

“ Not always,” he said quickly. “ I smile a bit to myself when I hear their talk ; but when they hurt people, when, with words about the Lord Jesus, and love, and peace, they crush poor creatures, and darken their lives, then, by God ! I'd like to kick them, man or woman, from one end of the parish to the other ! ”

Thornton struck his closed hand on the table,

and the glass beside him fell in pieces on the floor.

"There, you see," he said quietly, "how hot I am. After all, my dear, it's only blindness. How men do worry and confuse themselves, and always will, I suppose, to the end, because religion is not at all what they want it to be, not a neat little document which they can make their neighbours swallow. I don't think the parson has come to see me since that day when he tried to make me sign articles that the Lord had written every word of the Bible, and the Bible only. I ventured to suggest that the Lord had written a good deal of Plato and Shakespeare, and not a few other books. You should have seen his face, poor soul! And yet, I suppose, he would not deny when the wind blew that it was the same breath which made the song in the pine wood and the beech grove, though the sound differed. Well, it can't be helped—can it?"

Old Thornton filled another pipe.

"Is there company at The Dell?" he asked.

"Why are you not there?"

"It does not amuse me."

"Are you sure you know what you like?"



He fixed his bright eyes on her. "The young ought to be with the living a good deal. They take a fancy sometimes, not a true fancy, and they begin to fashion their lives by it; they have to go on somehow, though it grow a heavy burden."

Nora smiled.

"You think I am going to fancy myself a scholar and too wise for my generation, and that I shall keep to myself, and be very silly and conceited?"

"It might be. You mustn't read books only; you must play, and hate, and love."

"Yes, when I get the chance."

"Life is full of so many things. I wonder what you'll make of it all?"

He looked at her questioningly.

"I'll never let lies live," she said, with sudden energy. "Whatever my life may be, it will be made by the strength of my own will and desire. Accepting things means not caring, and if I don't care I had better be dead."

"Yes, but a strong will is not all."

Then Thornton was quite silent for some minutes.

"Will you go now, lass," he said suddenly,

“and tell Allan Moore, if you meet him, that I don’t want to see him to-day?”

She rose and put on her hat. Old Jos did not look up nor move. Nora came close to him. She wanted him to say good-bye, but he did not notice her. Then she touched his bent head, and smoothed back his silvery hair from his brow.

“You are a good lass,” he muttered. “God bless you.”

Not a hundred yards from the cottage Nora met Allan Moore, and gave him Thornton’s message.

Allan turned with her towards The Dell. She felt that till the last few months she had never lived. Now how changed was the aspect of everything! As she walked beside Allan she was filled with content; whether he spoke to her or was silent his presence satisfied her; her world was now coloured by the glow of her love. A foolish girl’s fancy, was it? Love smiles on the lips and sparkles in the eyes of all, but only in the single-hearted, the great-hearted does it burn with inextinguishable light, and they must accept their birth-right—its glory and its pain.

The sky had clouded over, and before they had gone half the way to The Dell there came a sudden storm of rain, of thunder and lightning. The wind rose quickly, and swept along the road, as if mocking everything that thought to resist it. Nora kept her head erect, and did not mind it much. She laughed as she held on her big hat with both hands. They came to the little lane which led to Allan's studio. Here Nora stopped.

"Now you'll go to your studio," she said. "Why should you be wet? I'll run home alone."

"Oh no," he answered quickly. "I'll go with you to The Dell."

"I would rather you did not come."

Allan looked at her for a moment, hesitated, then said slowly—

"Will you come with me till the rain is over?"

He did not like any one to come to his studio except Clifford, and it was an effort to be thus courteous. Nora flushed, and her eyes looked at him with an expression of many things, which was hard to read.

"Do you want me to go?" she asked gently.

Then, as he did not reply at once, she added—  
“Why do you not speak? I like the truth.”

Allan smiled. He was attracted by Nora, but he did not like her manner; she was too abrupt, not gentle enough for his ideal of womanhood. He could have liked her better had she been a man.

“The truth is, if you will have it, that I am morbidly sensitive about my work, and no one comes to my studio but Clifford. However, the sooner I get over that the better, so come along.”

He drew Nora's arm through his. The storm had grown worse in those few minutes, and the rain danced on the earth. When they reached the studio, Nora's dress was quite soaked through. She ran up the ladder, laughing.

“You are quite wet. What am I to do for you?” said Allan. “You'll get rheumatics and all sorts of dreadful things, if you keep that dress on!”

“No,” she said; “I'm very hardy. If you like to lend me a suit of clothes I could put it on, but I don't think I should quite like to go home in it. It would be fun to be dressed

as a man for once. I might fancy I had the good luck to be one."

"I'd be sorry to see you, even once, in such attire."

"Why so?" she said, taking off her hat and looking up at him.

Her face was changed; it was glowing with excitement, but the eyes were softened by new thoughts.

"I like a woman to look one, speak as one, act as one. Perhaps too much I love gentleness and grace."

"Till it is everything to you," she said quickly, "and you can't see the tenderness of soul, because of——" She stopped abruptly, and blushed, then added quickly—"of, I don't know what. Shall we light the fire? I could get dry then."

"I am afraid there's not much coal, and no wood."

"Can't we break up a box or two?"

"Oh yes, of course. There's that box I got some books from town in the other day."

So they set to work laughingly.

O youth! when the evil days come not

it is the philosopher's stone which turns everything to golden joy !

They knelt before the stove and burnt their fingers, blew the flame till they had scarce a breath left. The floor of this quaint studio was dirty ; there was not a comfortable chair to rest in. They were both cold and wet, and the storm howled dismally outside, but they were merry. Nora had not even glanced at any of the drawings which lay scattered about ; she was afraid to look, lest it should worry Allan, yet she felt that she could understand his work. Perhaps if he showed her his pictures she might say inappropriate words. She was awkward in speech, yet she knew about many things. Had she not dreams of her own ? Did she not live in a world of thought, which had little to do with the life that was moving round her ?

Presently the fire crackled and burst into flame, and they were triumphant. Then they put the kettle on, and made tea. Then Allan built up quite a comfortable seat with an old cushion and a basket, and Nora sat cosily by the fire. Her hair was wet from the rain, so she shook it out over her shoulders, and was

glad when she saw that Allan's eyes rested on her. She looked round on the almost bare room ; at the lay figure with lifted arms and clinging drapery ; at the few plaster casts on a table near the window ; at the bit of oriental stuff thrown on a chair ; at the easels, palettes, brushes ; at the portrait, over the fireplace, of Clifford in brigand's dress, arms folded, brows knit, with truly ferocious aspect ; at the waving boughs without and flickering firelight within, and wondered, with eager gaze into the future, whether this spot would grow familiar and dear to her, and be her haven of happiness, or whether this was only a glimpse of possible joy which would soon fade out of sight.

"And here you work day after day," she said, looking at him with that glow of interest in her eyes which loosens a man's tongue, "safe from every one, and not worried by people or things."

"I'm worried by myself," he answered, irresistibly speaking his real thoughts, "by my incapacity, my feverish waste of life. You look astonished," he added. "I don't feel it a waste when I am able to express even faintly what I want ; when there is one thought in my

brain which I feel to be strong and true, which my hands can fashion into form and life. But how often is that? And then all the other days and hours, when I am like a dog at the end of a leash! If I had submitted early and walked placidly to heel, it might have been better."

"Why should we be obedient to any law but our own?" Nora said quickly, with flashing eyes. "We can compel events if we like. We really make them, don't we?"

"Yes; and others make them, too. By our handling of life we may hurt others."

"We know when we are right and true. Why should we submit to the mistakes of others?"

Nora recognized the weight of the vicar's influence, and she impetuously threw all her eloquence into the opposite scale. Allan should not, must not be turned from his career by the blindness of a narrow-minded parson!

"We are bound in our own natures," she went on quickly, "and must listen to their cry, and not in a half sort of way. The intelligence of some people is not wide enough to understand, to have reverence for the needs



of souls which differ from their own. Are we to be bound by poor intelligences?"

"Love will bind us."

"Oh yes, perhaps."

Nora was silent for a minute; then she said—

"You see, I don't want to please the people I live with. I feel it would degrade me to take up their views and live by them; in fact, it would be too silly." She laughed. "There never seems to be any real reason for anything they say or do. They have not thought about life—never will—and not much about death, except in a fright!"

"I wish you were my brother," Allan said abruptly.

Nora did not raise her eyes. Of course, she knew it—his feeling towards her, the position she must always hold in his heart; of course, she knew it. Why should his words give her one touch of pain? And yet—well, she was no coward.

"Why not your sister?" she said, with a smile.

"Yes, that would be better," he answered, drawing near her.

"Why should we not make true relationships for ourselves, instead of being bored by the relationship of accident?"

This position that Nora offered to assume would be false, but she was not conscious of being untrue. She could be a sister to Allan. He was lonely. Perhaps she could be of use to him, and upon this understanding they could trust each other. What did it matter if she were pained?

Allan, loving Evelyn Holt, thought Nora might be a friend to them both. He could speak to Nora of Evelyn; he never felt inclined to talk to Clifford on this subject.

Allan took Nora's hand and held it, and she smiled and looked content.

"Nora," he said, "now and then you'll have to tell me your secrets, and listen to mine."

"I think I'll listen to yours first," she answered, and laughed.

Her eyelids never drooped, nor did the faintest flush steal to her cheek; yet she loved him. She withdrew her hand from his gently.

"I suppose I'm reserved," she said, "and shall be always."

"Yet you are not unsympathetic, as most reserved people are. I don't think I should feel a fool, if I talked to you enthusiastically of that which interested me, though you might never say a word about anything you cared for. It is strange how human creatures can go on without companionship. I like to tell my troubles and joys. I suppose it is very childish."

Nora looked at the delicacy of his face and the simplicity of his expression, the truthfulness, the faithfulness which could be read in his grey eyes. She thought this frankness one of the beauties of his character, and longed to possess it in some degree. But how different she was! At rare intervals, after long days of silence, days when her thoughts seemed to accumulate through the lonely hours, and press heavily on her brain, she longed feverishly for some friendly word; but a warning finger seemed always laid on her lips, a warning whisper in her ear, which checked all speech. What did any one care, and how bored would people be by the recital of her thoughts!

"It is not childish," she said quickly; like it. And some lives are interesting, and

be talked about ; and some are dull, dull as— Sunday, and the less said about them the better.”

The splashing rain had ceased. It was blowing hard ; but the sun burst forth, and changed the face of the heavens, from the frown of anger to the gleam of scornful laughter.

“ Now,” she said, rising, “ I’ll look at your pictures, and hear about your work. I’m growing so nervous, seeing all your drawings strewn about, and trying not to look at them, that the only way to be comfortable is to insist on seeing them at once.”

“ Then you may look at any thing you like,” he answered, laughing ; “ but I will not be an exhibitor.”

It was with no ignorant wonder, nor foolish fear of wounding Allan’s feelings, that Nora looked and criticized.

“ I think that’s weak and careless,” she said suddenly of one little picture, “ though it’s pretty. Look how beautifully you’ve drawn those flowers. Can you be satisfied with those hands ? ”

Then she began to laugh.

"Clifford says legs are my failing," Allan answered good-humouredly.

"Don't you write?" she asked, after turning over a number of drawings. "I want to hear what you have written. I want to know about your life. I am not stupidly inquisitive; I really am not."

Allan was under the influence of her thoroughness. Without a moment's hesitation he began to repeat some lines he had written a few days past, lines written enthusiastically when he had come from the presence of Evelyn, lines of love and art, inspired by her, and truer far than the source of inspiration.

Nora listened eagerly. There was the glow of feeling in his words, of passion, the spiritual worship of beauty; and he had found in earth, in sea, in sky, sympathy with his mood, of which he lovingly whispered. But after the first few verses the power flagged.

Nora put up her hands to her ears. "Stop!" she said; "don't say any more. The first part was all true and good, now you are saying what you think will sound well; it's not *you* at all."

"Yes, you are right; but you are too severe a critic."

"You'll have to be an artist of some sort," she said with decision. "You can't be anything else; but I don't know what you'll be. I think you want to live more, to see pain, and sorrow, and joy, and degradation, and all sorts of things very close, and then the too much dreaminess and softness will go out of what you do."

"What do you know of pain, and sorrow, and joy, and degradation that you talk of what they teach? You may be right; but how do you know?"

She looked down, and was silent. Then, after a minute, she said softly—

"Somehow I know."

"After all, we don't want pain or sorrow or degradation in art; nothing but beauty and joy."

"Yes," she answered eagerly, "but till you know life and the hearts of human creatures, you'll never know what is true beauty and poetry and joy; you'll only make pretty things, think pretty things, not beautiful things."

Allan was interested in this girl. He felt the clear strength of her mind. He loved

Evelyn ; but it was pleasant to him to talk to Nora, to watch her flashing eyes, and see the vigour of her thoughts in her expression, her movements, the upward toss of her head, and fearless glance.

"It will be good to have a sister, Nora," he said, holding out his hand to her.

She wrung it quickly, passionately, and let it drop.

"The alliance is not equal," she thought, "but from this time we are bound to each other."

"Never any less," she said aloud. "I don't like these things being said and not meant. After all, you'll not trust me as you do your friend, Mr. Clifford."

"No one can be the same to me as he is."

"You are very fond of him?"

"Fond of him ! There is no one like him."

"He does not seem very wonderful—a bright, good-natured sailor. I often think it strange you like him so much."

"He is true as steel ; as simple, manly, great-hearted a fellow as ever breathed. I suppose there is something in your nature which prevents you seeing how fine he is ; I am sorry there is."

Nora laughed.

"I can live without appreciating him."

She felt angry that he should speak so warmly of Clifford. He could never love Allan as she did.

"Yes," he answered quickly; "but I shall always think you lose something by not appreciating him."

"It is nothing but envy that made me speak like that. I envy your friendship for each other. I have no friends."

She rose and put on her hat hastily; and Allan felt somehow he must speak no word of sympathy to her. Nora gave him her hand, and said "Good-bye." As she turned to go, she added—

"I think I understand your work and your aim; but I can't criticize or suggest. The truth is, I was thinking of you more than of your painting or writing; learning a great deal of what you feel and think, and love and hate. I like to know it all."

Nora walked home in the fading light. She was older by many years, for she had measured one depth of human joy and pain; known the life of love and the death of renunciation.



## CHAPTER XV.

## A GAME SHE PLAYS WITH ALL.

SUDDENLY, in these days, Catherine recognized that Nora was no longer a child to be thrust aside, overlooked, or thwarted in life; but that Nora was her equal, as capable of winning friendship, love, admiration as she was herself. Into Nora's eyes, into her expression, into her words had come more dignity, more power, a new beauty, a something indescribable, which was distinctly recognized by Catherine, and the recognition was by no means pleasant to her. Her father, she considered, had done her an injustice by marrying a second time, and giving her a step-sister; but she was the firstborn, and she would make Nora feel her power. If she could but find some sensitive point in Nora, upon which to press judiciously, she could master her; so Catherine watched. She had

her own aims in life; but she was never so absorbed in her own pleasures as to relax her observation of others. That Nora's eyes were sweeter, softer, meant that she had new thoughts; and Catherine laughed, as she told herself that these must be thoughts of love. Of course, Nora was a sentimental fool; but whom did she love? Not the squire, for Catherine knew he gave no admiration to any one but herself; not Allan Moore, for all the world could see that he was fascinated by the doctor's daughter; besides, he was a dreamy, moonstruck creature, more in love with his own fancies than with any one else. Guy Clifford perhaps? Ah, that must be it! The best-looking man in the county! Did the poor fool think she could attract him? Then Catherine thought of Clifford, of his bright eyes and curling hair, of his active, well-made figure and look of careless strength; and she put him in contrast with Squire Armfield, and recalled the heavy face, ungraceful figure, and lustreless eyes of the latter.

Yes, undoubtedly, the owner of Armfield Towers was the man to marry, but Guy Clifford was the man to love. At any rate, Nora

should not come between her and her fancy. She would like to punish Nora, and she had found a means. To punish Nora, for what? For being Nora; and Catherine laughed to herself. When any creature exists, and is always there when you don't want it to be; the only thing to do, is to get some sort of satisfaction out of that which you cannot do away with. She would make Nora feel her power—her power to destroy this sentimental dream, which was making Nora's eyes so foolishly soft, and had changed her from an awkward, romping girl to a romantic woman, expectant of man's love. Guy Clifford had just come back from France. Catherine paced to and fro by the hedgerow in the garden, and made her plans.

When Nora had been a child, Catherine wished her away; now that she had grown to womanhood, she wished to see her near her and unhappy. If Nora went away, she might go to a happy, independent life; she might have riches and love and admiration. That must not be, for Nora had taken all her father's love; and now, instead of shaking off the memory of her low connections, she reminded every one, by the people she loved to associate

with, that her mother had been a milliner ! So Nora should suffer for setting them all at defiance, and glorying in her origin ; should suffer, too, for sneering at the want of education in her aunt and step-sister. Why should that little mocking smile of conscious superiority be indulged in by Nora ? She should see if the having read a few clever books, or if the pretence of despising conventionality, would bring her happiness or win her a lover.

With her head full of these thoughts, Catherine walked to the village. She believed in chance helping her ; she was superstitious ; she was sure she should meet Clifford that day, and she did. Not far from the village, on the country road, Catherine met Guy. He was singing as he walked. He had been pledging a comrade at the Sea Gull in a good many glasses of ale, and he was merry. Women were always attractive to Clifford, but specially so when he was merry. He stopped when he saw Catherine, and spoke to her. She had a bright colour, bright eyes ; she was pleasant to look at.

“ Well met, Miss Severne,” he said, with a smile.

She stretched her hand to him.

"I am glad to see you back again."

"How much can I believe you? Altogether, in part, or not at all?"

"As much as you like," she answered, with a smile, which was meant to woo, and did.

"I'm a very credulous fellow, and am ready to believe any pleasant, flattering word. Upon my soul, I love to be greeted with a glad smile by a pretty woman. Don't you think," he went on, "that a man's a fool who is not touched by a woman's kindness? I've a most responsive soul."

"To how many does it respond?" she asked, echoing his laughing mood.

"Not to more than one now, for all others cease to exist at a moment like this."

"Bravo, Clifford," he said to himself.

His bent head and glowing eyes gave force to his gallantry; and Catherine liked the game she had begun to play, and determined to win it.

"Even French girls," she said, "with their winning manners and graceful dress?"

"The world is wide, and I love pleasure,

wherever I am ; but I like an English girl best." Clifford thought of Nora as he spoke. "Now," he added, "won't you tell a poor sailor all the news ? Who's going to be married ? Who's dead ? Who has come to riches and high renown ?"

As he talked, they walked together towards The Dell.

"No one is dead, except a few old women in the village ; we are all on the eve of being married ; and I think my sister Nora will soon come to high renown, if she goes on as remarkably as she has done hitherto."

This was experimental on Catherine's part ; but Guy Clifford was not at all the man to be led into showing his mind by any little tricks of this sort. He laughed.

"What has your sister done ? Robbed a church, signed articles as an able-bodied seaman, or run away with the parish beadle ?"

"No ; but she has shaken off the trammels of young ladyhood, has selected old Thornton as her instructor, the village gossips as her companions, and the fishermen as her lovers. The last is conjectural ; but I fancy she has found an adorer amongst them, as she sighs

frequently, hangs her head, and shows signs of that mortal malady—love !”

“And if the fisherman be a comely fellow, why not ?” said Clifford. “I’m a slave to beauty myself. By Jove ! when I’m near a pretty girl, the world seems to hold no greater happiness for me than a kiss from her lips.”

“Ah,” thought Clifford, “she’s got a notion, the Lord knows how, that I like Nora ! There’s no such way to blind a woman as to make love to her.” So he looked at his companion with very unveiled admiration.

Catherine liked flattery, whatever form it took, and she answered his glance with one as eloquent.

“To kiss and forget is a sailor’s characteristic,” she said tauntingly.

“Not to forget. I never forget the delights of life ; but I’m not such a fool as to wander through the world in search of an ideal woman, and to be blind and deaf to all others. If I were a woman,” he added, “I’d glory in making a man forget all women but me. Come, you must have known that triumph ; tell me if it’s not delightful.”

"Have I the power? I would not use it with all."

"You've used it with the squire—poor fellow!" Clifford had seen them twice or thrice together. "But there it is," he added; "a poor devil of a sailor has no chance, no time to make an impression, to find out whom he likes or who likes him; and yet I'm a comelier man than the squire—I swear I am."

Guy was in the mood for courtship; he found it easy to woo after a few pleasant hours at the Sea Gull.

Catherine laughed.

"By far," she said.

They had reached The Dell. Catherine, who was a little in advance of Clifford, slipped through the open gate, and shut it in his face. It was a low wooden entrance. She looked across it at him, and her face was insolently attractive. Guy stood at the other side and smiled at her.

"Then why am I not favoured?" he asked.

"You would make a goodly lover; but the squire has wealth and lands."

She waved her hand, and turned away with a laugh.



"I'll make you pay for that," he answered, pushed the gate open, and in a second his arm was round her, and he had kissed her willing lips. "Come, don't scold," he said. "If I can't win a heart for a lifetime, I can win a pretty woman's kiss, and perhaps it suits me better." Then, with mock contrition of face, he added, "Don't bear me a grudge, I'm only a mannerless sailor, and you tempted me sore. By Jove! you look so stern, I must bolt."

He sprang over the low gate, and was gone in an instant.

It was an unlucky kiss.

Catherine looked quickly round to see if any unwelcome eye witnessed the scene; but as the only creature visible was a rabbit, which scuttled into the long grass, there was no reason for her to be shocked, and she smiled to herself.

Was Nora sentimentally musing on Guy Clifford? Did she think to commend herself to him by rowing out on the sea alone, and frequenting Thornton's cottage? It was not thus that men like Clifford were to be won.

Very deliberately Catherine appraised Clifford's attractions. Good-looking, gay, generous, with a remarkable skill in love-making. She

admired this accomplishment, and was indifferent as to the means by which this skill had been acquired in the past ; but, as she reflected on the charms of her lover, she felt that her conquest would not be that which she desired, if Clifford were liberal of his attentions to women in the future. Was he a man to kiss and tell ? She was by no means virtuously indignant at his having taken that liberty ; this passing sip of delight would make him desire a more prolonged repetition of the pleasure ; but if he were one of those fools who chatter about any woman who smiles on them, she should regret having indulged him. Regret ? No ; that would be a profitless emotion. If Clifford set little value on the caress he would deserve her scorn and anger, not her love, and he should get what he deserved. Catherine felt that Clifford was not a man to talk lightly of a woman, or make a boast of his successes ; but she reflected, with the world's wisdom, in which she was not wanting, that you can never know any man till you find him out, therefore she resolved to study Clifford's proclivities carefully.

Catherine meditated on her next meeting

with Clifford, and smiled as she thought how quickly her manner would show him that her favour was not so easily won as to-day's interview had, perhaps, led him to believe. He should soon learn that surprise, and a momentary impulse had made her yield to his embrace ; but having once known the pleasure of her kiss, he must now know the difficulty of winning it again. Surely into some women's ears the counsels of guile are whispered mysteriously in their earliest years, and they need no teachings of experience, no training in the world's ways to excel in luring even the wary into their power. The basis of Catherine's life was perfectly clear to her, and she despised any minds in which there was confusion as to the aims and art of existence.

As Catherine approached the hall door, she saw Nora coming into the flower ground by the little path through the wood. Her step was slow, her eyes were raised, but seemed to notice nothing around her, a sweet lingering smile parted her lips. She was dressed just as usual ; but her common gown and coarse straw hat could not take from the beauty which seemed suddenly developed in her. Catherine,

screened by a tall laurel tree, watched Nora. She stood still for a few minutes, then swiftly the expression of her eyes changed ; she seemed to look on the waving grass, the flowers, the golden light on the tree tops, and the deep shadows at their foot, on the clouds, and the sweet blue of the far-off sky, with a sudden recognition of their eternal beauty, as though the earth for her were transformed ; then she gave a long, tremulous sigh, which began in content and ended in sorrow, and turned into the house. Catherine followed her at a distance. Nora went to her room ; Catherine remained downstairs, but she left the drawing-room door ajar, that she might hear any chance sound.

More than an hour, perhaps, had gone by when Nora came down again, carrying some books. She still wore her hat. Catherine rose from her seat and listened. Nora opened the hall door, and went out.

“ Why should I not see what she does when she is away from home ? ” thought Catherine. She saw from the drawing-room window that Nora turned towards the wood path. It was growing dusk. Catherine waited a few

minutes, then followed. She hated being out when it was dark ; the shadows frightened her, the wind in the pines alarmed her. She disliked Nora the more for being the cause of her discomfort. Catherine soon saw Nora in the distance, and kept her in sight. Of course, Nora was going to old Thornton's, Catherine felt confident of that ; but she wanted to know who was in the cottage. She kept on the opposite side of the road, when Nora entered the little wicket gate. Old Jos opened the cottage door to her, and she went in. Catherine watched. The firelight flared up, and through the window she could see moving forms ; then she could distinguish three people sitting near the fire. One was old Thornton, of course ; one was Nora ; who was the third ? She was not near enough to the cottage to see the faces, but she felt that this was Clifford.

It was getting quite dark ; but Catherine, with gliding step, paced up and down the road, and resolved to wait till Nora came out ; whoever this third person was he would come out with her. They seemed to have little intention of moving, these three in Wreck Cottage ; and Catherine grew angry as she watched. A

weasel ran across the road and startled her ; it seemed a monster in the faint light. She checked the scream which came to her lips, but her heart beat, and her hands trembled. Another quarter of an hour went by, and Catherine's eyes were eagerly fixed on the cottage window, for she saw the figures moving within.

Suddenly something seized her ; some dark arm outstretched caught her by the throat ! It was only a moment of terror ; but it was a cruel moment, which transfixed her with fear, and was agony while it lasted. Her eyes on the cottage window, Catherine had not noticed where she walked, and an overhanging bough had struck her on the neck. When she recovered from the shock and could think, her hatred of Nora deepened. Was not she the cause of all this ?

The door of Wreck Cottage opened, Nora and Clifford came out. Catherine recognized his voice as he said " Good-night " to Thornton ; recognized his figure as he came through the wicket gate with Nora. Catherine kept close to the hedgerow, well under shadow of the trees, and followed them ; but she could not

venture near enough to hear all their words, and as she followed a mad love for Clifford—or a feeling which in her nature supplied the place of love—took possession of her. It was a passionate desire to enslave him, to be a power in his life for good or evil—it mattered little which ; and this desire was born of hatred for Nora, of anger that, because of Nora, she had trembled with fear ; and the desire was increased as she saw Nora's head turned towards Clifford with a movement of eager interest, which Catherine found unmistakable in its meaning. She caught Allan Moore's name ; Clifford was talking of him. Catherine smiled. It was not thus he had talked to-day. Men do not talk of other men to a woman they love, they talk of *her* ; but Nora was sly and secret, and by talking of his friend, no doubt, she thought to gain a place in Clifford's heart. She should see.

They reached The Dell gate, and as they stood there, Catherine could hear their words distinctly.

"Yes," Clifford said ; "I think old Jos's heterodoxy has done something for Allan ; he is not so hot on the Church as he used to be ;

and I think it's nearly settled that he is going to Italy."

Nora was silent a minute, then she said—

"I am very glad ; it's just where he ought to go. He'll find out there what he can best do ; he'll take a decided course in art."

"But he is getting into fresh trammels, I'm afraid," said Clifford.

"What do you mean ?" asked Nora quickly.

"Haven't you noticed it ? I thought women were so sharp about those things. Don't you see that he is in love with that little fool, Evelyn Holt ?"

Nora was silent again. Presently she said gently—

"She is very pretty."

"Pooh ! All scents and laces, with a face like a doll ! I like a woman with life and energy, as God Almighty made her. Poor Allan ! I'm very sorry, and I hope I'm wrong."

They were both silent. Some heavy clouds drifted off, and the moon threw a little light on their faces. Catherine could see that Nora's eyes were fixed on Guy with a yearning, questioning gaze. Clifford was looking on the ground.



"Ah," thought Catherine, "that thrilling glance of Nora's does not seem to have a very telling effect."

"Good-night," said Nora quietly.

Then it suddenly struck Catherine that, unless she turned off at once by the road to the moor, she might be discovered by Clifford, standing under the trees, so she slipped away, though she longed to hear how Clifford responded to this farewell.

She was terribly afraid to go up the moor road alone, so she only went a little way. When she came back again there was no one at The Dell gate, and she walked up the avenue unseen. The house was still. Miss Dixon and Nora had gone to their rooms. Though it was early, Catherine took her candle and went to her bed.

"Men are easily flattered and easily lured," she thought, as she slowly undressed that night; "and though Guy Clifford does not care a straw about Nora now, she is so sly and will lay such traps for him that he may be entangled, unless I watch them carefully."

Catherine let her clothes drop to her feet, and stood for a moment with a slight smile,



looking at her rounded limbs and flawless figure.

“What fools women are,” she thought, “to take pleasure in forgetting themselves, and to fling away their life for a man they happen to fancy. I think,” she mused, as she loosened her hair and it fell down over her white shoulders, “I am better worth cherishing than any man; and to love myself first is the only sensible thing to do. The whole pleasure of life is in conquering, not in being conquered. It is delightful to feel a human creature in your power; here, in your hand, to crush as you like.”

Her cheek flushed, and her outstretched hand closed involuntarily till the white fingers looked whiter from the tight pressure; then she went to bed, and slept the sleep of a soulless animal.

END OF VOL. I.









